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An Amostic Prophecy: Fredrick Douglass' *The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro*

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This article is used to offer an explanation of how Frederick Douglass, in his 1852 "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro," broke the social and generic constraints of the day and still produced one of the greatest speeches of the nineteenth century. I argue that the success of the Fourth of July oration was, in part, due to three factors. First, the speech's structural parallel with the Old Testament book of Amos supplied a powerful, persuasive template for the abolitionist cause. Second, Douglass' ability to create a messenger persona enabled the Amostic message to be perceived as authentic. Finally, the audience's faith in civil religion cultivated a belief that a prophetic visit was possible and warranted given that their "sin of slavery" broke their "sacred covenant" with God. These factors elevated Douglass' speech into a higher realm of accountability. Consequently, Douglass was free to break the constraints of racial and rhetorical appropriateness imposed on non-prophetic orators.
Keywords: *Frederick Douglas, Amos, Jeremiad, Fourth of July*

On the warm afternoon of July 5, 1852, the men, women, and children of Rochester, New York, crowded into Corinthian Hall to hear the newly touted "slave turned abolitionist," Frederick Douglass, speak.[1] The highly anticipated address, "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro," was written specifically for this occasion in response to an invitation by the Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Sewing Society. Douglass, born into slavery, had recently purchased his freedom and was rapidly becoming one of the most recognized and gifted abolitionist speakers of his day. N. P. Rogers called this new rhetorical phenomenon, "a man with few equals," while William Allen, professor of rhetoric at Central

College, wrote that "no one can begin to approach the celebrated Douglass" (Roger, 1847, p. 203; Gregory, 1969, p. 3).

Even with his formidable oratory skills, the social and generic constraints of the day gave Douglass his most challenging rhetorical situation to date. Socially, he was an ex-slave speaking to a predominantly white, upper-class audience in 1852. Furthermore, he was attempting to not only garner moral support but to also procure financial donations for the abolitionist cause. He had to be passionate but not impudent; committed but not threatening. For, while the Rochester audience may have been liberal by nineteenth-century standards, this did not mean they would tolerate "impudent Negroes."

If these social considerations were not confining enough, he also battled with the generic constraints of the day. Such Independence Day orations, according to historian Cedric Larson, were unquestionably the most anticipated speeches of the year (1940, p. 14). Howard H. Martin, concurring with Larson on the speech's social importance, wrote:

> It is no exaggeration to say that the Fourth of July was the most important national ceremonial during the last century. It was all but universally observed—at least during the years before the Civil War—by a public address delivered by one of the most respected members of the community. (1953, p. 400)

Over time, argue both Larson and Martin, certain rhetorical expectations emerged which "created, perpetuated, and reinforced a peculiar rhetorical tradition and standard of popular eloquence" (Martin, 1953, p. 400). Of these rhetorical standards, the three most recurring and demanding "rules of content" were that the speech must 1) celebrate the virtues of American independence, 2) create unity through commonality, and 3) instill nationalistic pride. To break any of these social or generic rules, as Douglass certainly knew, would mean almost certain rhetorical disaster.

Nonetheless, by the time Douglass finished his speech on that July afternoon, he managed to break these three social and generic rules. This gifted orator not only acrimoniously scolded his white audience, he also 1) highlighted the hypocrisy of celebrating independence while four million blacks remained enslaved, 2) used separatist language in bifurcating black and white interests, and 3) instilled nationalistic shame. In doing so, Douglass crafted, in the words of William S. McFeely, the "greatest antislavery oration ever given" (1991, p. 173). Phillip Foner concurs, seeing this speech as Douglass' "most famous oration" in his long and illustrious career (1972, p. 127). For John Lucaites, the speech was "one of the clearest and most compelling statements" for human rights ever delivered (1999, p. 28).

This paper is used to explain how this rule-breaking speech earned such enviable honors.[2] Specifically, I argue that Douglass' oration maintained a structural parallel with the Old Testament prophecies of Jeremiah, Isaiah, and particularly Amos. This parallel allowed Douglass to break the generic and social constraints normally imposed on unordained speakers, while it empowered him to castigate his white audience for their passivity in the struggle for black independence. As James Darsey (1997) has argued, "The prophet cannot be held personally culpable for his message" as he is simply a chosen conduit for the Lord's word (17). Furthermore, I assert that because of their belief in America's "chosen status," Douglass' audience provided exceptionally fertile ground for prophetic messages cast as *civil-religious* rhetoric. Douglass' Amostic message was congruent with America's existential cultural narrative that defined the audience's presence in the world and their obligations and responsibilities as citizens. In supporting this argument, I will first, supply a brief overview of Douglass' life leading up to 1852; second, establish a theoretical foundation by examining the research on America's civil religion and the prophet persona in rhetoric; third, illustrate Douglass' use of an Amostic form as an alternative, prophetic framework; and fourth, discuss the aspects of Douglass' speech that strengthened his messenger ethos.

Frederick Douglass—The Speech's Antecedents

Frederick Douglass was born a slave in Tuckahoe, Maryland, in 1817.[3] In 1838, at the age of 21, he borrowed a free black's papers and boarded a train to New Bedford, Massachusetts (Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, pp. 353-363). Within two years of his escape, Douglass became actively involved in the antislavery struggle. His speeches received high praise from white audiences in the Northeast as well as from leaders in the movement such as William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips. Douglass' rhetorical skills made him the most popular black abolitionist of the time, shocking audiences with stories of the South's "peculiar institution." He also served as a vivid example of a well-educated, articulate man, demonstrating that blacks, even those held as slaves, were neither inherently unintelligent nor immoral. During the next five years, Douglass, drawing on the stories that were so effective in his speeches, published the first of three autobiographies, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass*, which became one of the most popular books of its time, and is, to this day, considered a classic of its genre (Gregory, 1969, p. 32).

Not content to rest on past accomplishments, Douglass, in December 1847, published the first issue of the *North Star*, an abolitionist weekly newspaper. Renamed *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, this organ served as a platform for Douglass' increasingly radical views on slavery, emancipation, and the Constitution. Not surprisingly, it was during this time when Douglass and his more conservative mentor and friend William Lloyd Garrison had a falling out. This division occurred over two crucial philosophical issues that are both evident in the Independence Day address. The first was Douglass' new radical approach to the movement. Douglass' philosophy evolved from passivism to active resistance and finally, to violent, civil disobedience. While there were many admitted causes for this philosophical change, none was more profound than meeting the white, radical abolitionist, John Brown (infamous for the Harper's Ferry Raid) in 1847. Douglass wrote that "While I continued to write and speak against slavery, I became all the same less hopeful

of its peaceful abolition. My utterances became more and more tinged by the color of this strong man's impressions" (Foner, 1971, p. 160). By 1852, responding to the Fugitive Slave Law, Douglass had gone as far as to say, "The only way to make the Fugitive Slave Law a dead letter is to make half a dozen or more dead kidnappers" (Foner, 1950, p. 207). Obviously, this new militant approach emerged in direct opposition to the Garrisonian philosophy of reform through moral suasion. The second rift between Douglass and Garrison concerned Douglass' new anti-slavery interpretation of the Constitution; Douglass now believed that America's most consequential document denounced slavery, not protected it. Garrison and his followers, on the contrary, strongly believed that the American Constitution "... affirmed the rights of slavery, and was therefore—in the phrase from Isaiah—'a covenant with death and an agreement with hell'" (Filler, 1986, p. 247).[4] Thus, by July 4 1852, Douglass was more well known, more radical, and had less white support within the movement, than ever before.

Civil Religion and the Prophetic Tradition

The people of the United States have "always believed America to be somehow special and uniquely set apart from the rest of the world." Howard-Pitney asserts that Americans' belief that their country is special "and an exemplar for other nations is as hoary as the Pilgrims and as contemporary as each presidential campaign" (1990, p. 5). This belief in the chosen status of America has been labeled by Robert Bellah as our "Civil Religion." According to Bellah, there exist in America

> certain common elements of religious orientation that the great majority of Americans share. These have played a crucial role in the development of America's institutions and still provide a religious dimension for the whole fabric of American life, including the political sphere. (1970, p. 171)

Michael W. Hughey concurs and asserts that the nation's founders shaped the "form and tone of American civil religion by establishing a relationship between certain religious notions, including a God, and the emerging self-conception of the new nation" (1983, p. 158).

Most importantly for the study of public rhetoric, America's civil religion has the power to mobilize "deep levels of personal motivation for the attainment of national goals." Through the nation's belief that it "stands under transcendent judgment," America has felt morally obligated to realize and strive for its "higher law" (Hughey, 1983, p. 158). Within this civil religion is an expressed balance between individualism and communal obligation. Consequently, this cultural myth establishes a moral code of behavior that, according to Bellah and Hughey, has guided America's secular decision making and highlighted its moral deficiencies. Some of the more specific moral values expressed in this faith, according to Bellah, are liberty, justice, charity, civic-mindedness, sacrifice for the common good, and respect for individual rights—the same recurring motifs that dominated Douglass' 1852 Independence Day oration (Hughey, 1983, p. 159).

With this concept woven into the American conscience, it is not surprising that appeals to fulfill civil-religious responsibility have permeated America's public-address history. While Christianity has always been the dominant religion in America, it has been the *Old* Testament that has been most often used as a medium for this message. As Hughey has remarked, the God of American civil religion is "somewhat deist, rather unitarian and also on the austere side," much more concerned with law and order than with the themes of salvation and love associated with the New Testament (1983, p. 158).

During the abolitionist movement, for instance, engendering the theme of civil religion in public discourse relied heavily on analogies and parallels with the "chosen people" of the Old Testament and their prophets. As Ballah (1967), Richey & Jones (1974), and Howard-Pitney (1990) have asserted, the merger of civil religion and the prophetic voice in American public discourse is synergistic, each

making the other stronger and more effective. Frederick Douglass' reliance on the Old Testament and its prophets for rhetorical inspiration, for instance, remained steadfast throughout his long and illustrious career. In this text he found an accepted and credible source of evidence. More importantly Douglass found the Bible's exodus and prophet narratives well suited to the abolitionist cause. Like Moses' Jews, Douglass' race longed for deliverance into the "promised land" where they could find solace from the arbitrary abuse of power.

Furthermore, such rhetoric, argues Molefi Asante, "contributed to the heightening of the contradictions within the pre-Civil War American society" and the values embraced by civil religion (1987, p. 90). Douglass was not alone in adopting the Bible in the fight for abolition. Berry and Blassingame argued that "Most 19th Century black abolitionists had a strong belief in the presence and power of God in everyday life and emphasized revelations, visions, and dreams" in their public and private expressions (1982, p. 99). In fact, many leading speakers of the movement "gravitated towards ... the traditional rules of homiletics and exegesis," making the connection between the sacred and the political inseparable (Asante, 1987, pp. 87-88).

The Jeremiad

The merging of the sacred and secular spheres in American rhetoric constitutes a distinct body of discourse with sufficient similarities to warrant legitimate generic status. Such forms, in the words of Kenneth Burke, "are recurrent enough for men to feel the need of having a name for them." Perry Miller (1953), David Minter (1974), Sacvan Bercovitch (1978), Kurt Ritter (1981), Ronald Carpenter (1978), and David Howard-Pitney (1990) have identified and labeled one such form the "Jeremiad."[5]

The Jeremiad form has dominated scholarly discussion of prophet rhetoric since Miller's 1953 book. It can be argued, in fact, that the "Jeremiad" has become inseparable from, if not synonymous

with, the study of "prophetic rhetoric." While the genre is useful as a critical tool in some contexts, it is not sufficient as a grand template for all prophetic rhetoric. After a brief preview of the Jeremiad model, I will illustrate some of its weaknesses and limitations when applied to Douglass' 1852 address.

The name Jeremiad emerged, according to most, because the given rhetorical text is found to rely on the Old Testament book of Jeremiah for content, form, and inspiration. According to Miller (1953), the first appearance of this strategy can be traced to the discourse of the Puritans as they settled the New England Territory during the seventeenth century. As Ritter has written, "the Puritan Jeremiad can be characterized by its origin as a type of sermon in which the minister exhorted the people to 'get right with God'" (1981, p. 157).

While the genre has many subtleties and has been used in myriad forums, a lucid understanding of the approach can be obtained through an analysis of its essential features: The Jeremiad 1) is organized around the general themes of sin to redemption to reform; 2) often applies religious discourse to secular affairs; 3) assumes that the target audience being warned has been "chosen" by God—as were the Jews before them; and 4) is delivered by a speaker who has prophetic insights and who is a member of the target community. Furthermore, the Jeremiad has a unique organizational structure. Typically, the Puritan preacher set forth a three-part arrangement. First, he told the body that they had failed to keep their covenant with God. Second, the minister "would reveal how the warnings of Jeremiah were being fulfilled by pointing to the evils that God was visiting upon His people as punishment" (Ritter, 1981, p. 158). Third, the speaker called upon the congregation to take active steps to correct their sins and to repent for their transgressions.

The Puritans, however, were not the only Americans who used this prophetic pattern. According to David Howard-Pitney (1990), the "American Jeremiad has been frequently adapted for the purposes of black protest and propaganda, starting with the abolitionist crusade against slavery in the North" (p. 12). Since the Civil War

and emancipation of the African-American slave, the "black Jeremiad" has been identified in the public discourse of Booker T. Washington, W.E.B. DuBois, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Jesse Jackson (Howard-Pitney, 1990). Howard-Pitney and Moses agree that the "black" and "white" Jeremiads are structurally identical, possessing the same rhetorical organization (three-part arrangement), goal (scolding the public for its sins against God), and inventional source (the Old Testament book of Jeremiah).

While the Jeremiad lends itself to certain "messenger" situations, it is not suited for all contexts in which a prophet-like persona is desired. Specifically, its form and content limit who can use it and when it can be used. For Douglass' purpose on that July Fourth afternoon, the Jeremiad was ill-suited for two crucial reasons. First, it requires the "prophet" to be part of the community that is being scorned. Being a black slave in 1852, eleven years before the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, Douglass was anything but included by his country or its laws. Second, whereas the traditional Jeremiad points to current problems as proof of God's anger and castigation, Douglass did not view America's problems as a sign of God's anger, but of America's moral weakness. He believed that if the United States did not *soon* change its policy toward the black race, the full force of God's wrath would be leveled on the nation. Thus, Douglass needed a prophetic form that would allow him to separate himself from the community, and predict tragedy rather than describe current catastrophes as proof of God's vengeance.[6]

Douglass and the Prophet Amos

Douglass' speech overcame the limitations of the Jeremiad form through a structural parallel with the Old Testament book of *Amos*, a text previously overlooked by rhetorical critics for its persuasive potential.[7] Amos was the third of the twelve-minor prophets during the reign of Uzziah, King of Judah (c. eighth century BC). According to C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, he was "among the shepherds of Tekoah when the Lord called him to be a prophet" (1977, p. 233). Amos

was sent to Bethel, into the kingdom of the ten tribes, to announce to the sinners the impending divine judgment and destruction of the kingdom. His book is, in the words of Keil and Delitzsch, "a carefully planned, complete work in which Amos ... gathered together all the essential contents of the prophecies he had previously uttered at Bethel" (1977, pp. 236-237).

The structure of *Amos* gave Douglass a special utility and inspiration for his abolitionist cause. The text not only fulfilled the shortcomings of the Jeremiad form, it also supplied him with a prophetic persona necessary for his rule-breaking discourse. The book of *Amos* was a well-known and often-used book from the Old Testament (Howard-Pitney, 1990, p. 57). Douglass' white audience would have been almost as familiar with the text's content and form as they were with the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah. This familiarity enabled Douglass to adopt a more rhetorically appropriate prophetic strategy for his specific needs on that July Fourth afternoon, while continuing to draw inspiration from the familiar and effective "messianic idiom."

Additionally, both Amos and Douglass shared common experiences in their lives and in their prophetic tasks. Amos, like Douglass, was from the South who came North to prophesies. In Amos' case, it was to reprimand the tribes of Northern Israel; for Douglass, it was to castigate the Northern states of the Union. Both, however, delivered a clear warning—"get right with God or else!" Furthermore, the two men both started from humble beginnings. As discussed earlier, Douglass was born into America's oppressive slavery system and was banned from "formal" education. Amos was similarly poor, uneducated, and lived in indigent circumstances. Keil and Delitzsch in their historic commentary concur and claim that unlike most of the prophets, Amos never, "dedicated himself to the calling of a prophet, and without even being trained in the schools of the prophets, he was called by the Lord away from the flock as a simple shepherd to be a prophet" (1977, p. 234). One may wonder whether such personal and demographic parallels encouraged Douglass' audience to perceive him as Amostically prophetic.

The commonalties between Douglass' speech and *Amos* also allowed the orator to separate himself from the community being rebuked. The traditional, commonly used prophets were almost always active members of the berated community. Amos, a messenger from outside, stood as one of the few exceptions to this prophetic rule. This rhetorical strategy of separating from the main body would become a crucial element in Douglass' Fourth of July oration. As he acrimoniously proclaimed, "This Fourth of July is *yours*, not *mine*. *You* may rejoice, *I* must mourn" (p. 136).

The Amostic form also allowed Douglass to predict the future wrath of God, without pointing to present catastrophes as warning signs of the Lord's anger. In his trek to northern Israel, the prophet Amos predicted that the deviant tribes "would be destroyed" if they did not stop their greed, warring, and enslavement. Similarly, in Douglass' trek to northern America, he predicted that America would be "crushed and destroyed" if they did not break away from the "hideous monster" of slavery (p. 148). *Amos,* once again, satisfied Douglass' specific rhetorical exigency.

Furthermore, the Amostic form supplies a temporal alternative to the generic Independence Day address with its emphasis on the "past." Howard Martin argued that the very nature of "traditional" Independence Day orations demanded that the speaker "clarify and maintain American national values" through the celebration of its historic past (1953, p. 393). The primary problem with such a focus is that one is constrained from discussing the present or the future—an obvious necessity for a prophet or an abolitionist. Amos, however, adopted the forward chronological sequence—a more appropriate temporal arrangement for prophesying. Specifically, the Old Testament book a) reminded the ten tribes of their illustrious *past*, b) castigated them for their transgressions in the *present*, and c) prophesied their *future*. Similary, Douglass also utilized the same temporal evolution, taking his listeners from the past (paragraphs 1-31), into the present (paragraphs 32-68), and concluding in the future (paragraphs 69-71). Through this Amostic chronological structure,

Douglass freed himself from the generic constraints of the Fourth of July form with its penchant for privileging the "past." Consequently, he also found a more appropriate temporal pattern for his prophetic message.

Finally, the disposition of *Amos* was appropriate for Douglass' needs. An analysis of this nine-chapter, Old Testament book reveals a five-stage storyline: 1) *Affirmation*: The community is told that they are the chosen group; 2) *Condemnation*: The community is informed that they have broken the religious, moral, and legal covenant of God; 3) *Narration*: Stories of wrongs committed by the community are enumerated; 4) *Admonishment*: A warning is delivered that if the transgressions continue, punishment will follow; and 5) *Inspiration*: The conclusion leaves the community with a sense of hope about the future. An analysis of Douglass' 72-paragraph "The Meaning of July Fourth for the Negro," reveals the same five stages. The next section illustrates this organizational parallel.

The Amostic Arrangement of the Fourth of July Address[8]

At the beginning of the speech, Douglass' primary objective, as was Amos' before him, was to *affirm* his audience's sense of self-worth and ethnocentric pride. He accomplished this placating task by focusing on two related concepts. First, he reminded his listeners, as did Amos, that they were a "chosen people," a people who fought for, and won, their independence against a totalitarian force. Douglass called them "men of honesty and men of spirit," "brave men," "wise men," men possessing "rare virtue," and men who "command respect." Attempting to create a sacred connection to their privileged, "chosen" status, Douglass drew parallels to the Israelites—God's first selected group. He said, "This [Independence Day], to you, is what the Pass-over was to the emancipated people of God. It carries your minds back to the day, and to the act of your great deliverance" (p. 129). Similarly, Douglass compared the oppressive British government to the oppressors of the ancient Jews. He wrote that the British were

blind in their brutality, "a characteristic of tyrants since Pharaoh," who paid for their transgressions by being "drowned in the Red Sea" (p. 131). Finally, in paragraph 30, Douglass compared his American audience to the chosen children of Jacob and Abraham in their reverence to their ancestors and their love of their history (p. 135). Given the audience's propensity towards civil religion, such statements rang true to their conception of their place in the world.

A second strategy used by Douglass in placating to his audience's ego involved detailing their forefathers' great accomplishments during the Revolution of 1776, making his listeners feel nationalistic while obeying the generic and social constraints of the day. He reminded them, for example, that "... seventy-six years ago the people of this country were British subjects ... But your fathers ... differed from the home government in respect to the wisdom and the justice of some of those burdens and restraints" (p. 130). Douglass continued, "To say now that America was right and England wrong is exceedingly easy." Your fathers, believed they were "harshly and unjustly treated by the home government" and "like men of honesty and men of spirit, earnestly sought redress" (p. 131). Finally, Douglass claimed that he "does not want in respect" for these "great men—great enough to give fame to a great age" and that he "cannot contemplate their great deeds with less than admiration" (p. 133).

For the first 30 paragraphs of the speech, Douglass obeyed the rules of the day, both generically and socially. He not only fulfilled the audience's rhetorical expectations by celebrating the greatness of their revolutionary past, he also conducted himself in an "appropriate fashion" befitting an American Negro in the 1800s. Then, in paragraph 31, Douglass violated these generic and social norms and snapped into stage two of his address—*condemnation*. The power of this transition was augmented by stage one's placating rhetoric. After 30 paragraphs of patronizing discourse aimed at creating a false sense of ethnocentric pride, he sarcastically asserted, as if pulled from a hypnotic trance, "pardon me, allow me to ask, why am I called upon to speak here today? What have I, or those I represent, to do with

by asking me to speak today" (p. 136)? With these three brief questions, Douglass abruptly shifted the focus from nationalistic pride to nationalistic shame. "How dare you celebrate independence when 40 million remain in chains" (p. 137). The audience, like Amos' before them, had been "set up."

By changing the tone of the speech, stage two bifurcated the speaker from his audience. As stated above, this separation is a crucial characteristic in the Amostic form. In one of his more impressive rhetorical strategies, Douglass accomplishes this separation through the masterful manipulation of pronouns. Douglass states, "It is the birthday of *your* national independence, and of *your* political freedom" (p. 136). Again, in paragraph 33, Douglass wrote, "This Fourth of July is *yours*, not *mine*, *You* may rejoice, *I* must mourn" (p.136). And, "the rich inheritance of *your* fathers, is heired by *you*, not by *me*. The sunlight that brought light and healing to *you*, has brought stripes and death to *me*" (p. 136). From these short excerpts, we see Douglass' disproportionate use of the pronouns "you," "your," and "me" while avoiding such collective pronouns as "ours," "us" and "we." By such word choice, Douglass established a dichotomy between the white audience, who had been emancipated, and the Negro, who it had enslaved.

Douglass continued the use of this rhetorical technique throughout the course of the speech. From paragraph to paragraph, the separation becomes more and more extreme. By the time the speech draws to its conclusion, Douglass incorporated 368 individualized pronouns (I, my, me, mine, you, your) as opposed to only 52 collective pronouns (us, our, we)—a seven-to-one ratio. What makes this disproportionate distribution even more dramatic is that the Fourth of July oration genre demands community-building discourse that has been traditionally actualized through the use of collective pronouns.

The final task of stage two, like that found in the book of *Amos*, was to castigate the audience for their transgressions. It is here that Douglass clearly broke the social norms of the nineteenth century by publicly scolding his white audience. He acrimoniously asserted, for example, "I will not equivocate; I will not excuse; I will use the

severest language I can command; ... I do not hesitate to declare, with all my soul, that the character and conduct of this nation never looked blacker to me than on this Fourth of July" (p. 137). In paragraph 32, he attacked the country's national pride by claiming, "America is false to the past, false to the present, and solemnly binds herself to be false to the future" (p.136). In paragraph 35, Douglass again castigated his audience by pejoratively comparing America with its international counterparts: "There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices more shocking and bloody than are the people of the United States at this very hour ... for revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival" (p. 137). Finally, in paragraph 61, Douglass delivers his boldest invective by not only condemning the state but the church as well. "Americans!" he proclaimed, "your republican politics, not less than your republican religion, are flagrantly inconsistent. You boast of your love of liberty, your superior civilization and your pure Christianity, while the whole political power of the nation is solemnly pledged to support and perpetuate the enslavement of three million of your countrymen" (p. 147). Such acrimonious attacks on the nation and its people must have sounded exceptionally forceful and shocking since, first Douglass, only eleven paragraphs earlier, was celebrating America's virtue, second, such claims were clearly antithetical to the rhetorical expectations of the day, and third, Douglass was perhaps the only black man to ever publicly reprimand most, if not all, of the white people in the audience.

Stage three of the Amostic form uses *narratives* as evidence to support the charges of guilt made in stage two. As rhetoricians from Aristotle to Stephen Toulmin have written, disputed claims need data as support if an argument is to be judged as lucid and credible. In Amos' third stage, for example, one finds narratives detailing the sins committed by the Ten Northern Tribes which support the prophet's major claim. Similarly, Douglass' third stage used narratives to support the claim of hypocrisy by the northern states. Douglass' narratives had two separate foci: the state and the

church. From paragraphs 44 through 51, he detailed the sins of the "state" by discussing, for example, the slave market. He tells listeners to envision the "men and women reared like swine for the market," or to "see the old man with locks thinned and gray. Cast one glance, if you please, upon that young mother, whose shoulders are bare to the scorching sun, her briny tears falling off the brow of the babe in her arms" (pp. 140-143). As his slave market story continued, he detailed the sights and sounds of a young girl and the slave traders and auctioneers who participate in this "great sin." He said,

> See, too, that girl of thirteen, weeping—yes, weeping—as she thinks of the mother from whom she has been torn! ... suddenly you hear a quick snap, like the discharge of a rifle; the fetters clank, and the chain rattles simultaneously; your ears are saluted with a scream, that seems to have torn its way to the center of your soul! (p. 141)

Politicians, slave traders, and the passive American public were not the only people Douglass used to support his claim that America has fallen from grace. In the tradition of *Amos*, the "church" was also damned for its betrayal of the laws of God. Of the church and its response to the Fugitive Slave Law, Douglass said, "I take this law to be one of the grossest infringements of Christian liberty, and if the churches and ministers of our country were not stupidly blind or most wickedly indifferent, they too would so regard it" (p. 143).[9] Douglass also condemned the church for its alliance with the slave trader, hunter, and owner. In paragraph 54, he declares, "But the church of this country is not only indifferent to the wrongs of the slave, it actually takes sides with the oppressors. It has made itself the bulwark of American slavery and the shield of the American slave hunter" (p. 144).

Douglass, like his model Amos, focused on both the sins of the state and of the church to support his claim of corruption and hypocrisy. Specifically, Amos' narratives enumerated the sins of

warring, financial exploitation, and breaking the covenant of the Lord. Douglass' supporting narratives focused on the state and the church's tolerance of slavery. Both men sought to craft well-supported, emotionally compelling arguments.

Amos and Douglass' fourth stage delivered an *admonishment* that if the transgressions detailed in stage three continued, punishment would surely follow. As stated earlier, this stage is one of the areas that dramatically deviates from the rhetorical Jeremiad. Specifically, both prophets predicted the future wrath of God; they did not point to present catastrophes as warning signs of the Lord's anger. In the words of *Amos*, "Woe to you who are complacent in Zion." In the Fourth of July text, Douglass' warning began on paragraph 63 where he emphatically asserts, "Oh, be warned! Be warned! A horrible reptile is coiled up in your nation's bosom; the venomous creature is nursing at the tender breast of your youthful republic." He continued, "for the love of God, tear away and fling from you the hideous monster, and let the weight of twenty millions crush and destroy it forever! " (p. 148). Again Douglass warned that this corruption "seriously disturbs and endangers your union." "It is the deadly foe ... It breeds insolence; it promotes vice; it shelters crimes and is a curse to the earth ... Be warned!" (p. 148). The obvious goal of this stage, for both prophets, was to scare the audience into capitulation. In fact, one might argue that the Amostic strategy is potentially more effective in persuading individuals to act in that the fear of the unknown seems to be greater than the fear of the known and accepted.

Both Amos and Douglass might have ended their message with stage four. Indeed, many messages conclude with warnings. For these two prophets, leaving an audience with a sense of *inspiration* and hope about the future was a more prudent rhetorical choice. Perhaps these men understood what contemporary communication research confirms—extreme appeals to fear do not work in motivating the public (Woodward & Denton, 1996). Instead Amos and Douglass gave their audiences motivation for change through a vision of a better tomorrow. Douglass wrote:

"Allow me to say, in conclusion, notwithstanding the dark picture I have this day presented of the state of the nation, I do not despair for this country... The arm of the Lord is not shortened, and the doom of slavery is certain." He optimistically continued, "I, therefore, leave off where I began, with HOPE" (p. 150).

Making sure that he also reconfirmed the national pride that was questioned in stage two, Douglass reiterated the greatness of his audiences' forefathers and the nation: "... drawing encouragement from the Declaration of Independence, the great principles it contains and the genius of American institutions, my spirit is cheered" (p. 151). Finally, Douglass concluded the speech with a sense of ecclesiastic hope by telling his listeners that God would forgive and even facilitate the nation's transformation from slavery to independence for all. In the last paragraph, borrowing from the book of Genesis, he wrote,

> The far-off and almost fabulous Pacific rolls in grandeur at our feet. The Celestial Empire, the mystery of ages, is being solved. The fiat of the Almighty, "**Let there be Light,**": has not yet spent its force. No abuse, no outrage, whether in taste, sport or avarice, can now hide itself from the all-pervading light. (p. 151)

As one reads Douglass' oration, Amos' five stages clearly emerge, leading listeners from a false sense of national pride, to condemnation, finally arriving at a place of hope. Placed into the larger context of America's civil religion, these five stages worked synergistically with the audience's belief of their "chosen status" to create a storyline where such a prophetic visit was possible and warranted. But the arrangement alone is not sufficient to make this format successful. In order for Amos and Douglass to arrive at their desired ends, both men had to create a credible persona. They had to be believable prophets in the eyes of their audience. To fail at this task would negate all other rhetorical accomplishments.

Ethos Building of Douglass' Prophet

The speech's structural parallel with the book of *Amos* was only one factor that led to its success. Douglass' audience also had to perceive him as a messenger capable of delivering an authentic prophecy. Failure to transform his persona from "ex-slave" to "prophet of God" would mean certain rhetorical disaster. As James Darsey (1997) writes, "Prophetic speech is incomprehensible except as the speech of a divine messenger; the prophet, properly understood speaks for another ... often against his will" (16). As Amos himself decreed, "The Lord Yahweh hath spoken; who can but prophesy?" Contrary to the theories posited by rhetoric's Greek forefathers, therefore, *inventio* and *actio* are not always creations of the single rhetor. "Prophecy is in a significant respect a performance from script" (Darsey, 1997, p. 16). Consequently, for Douglass' social and generic rule-breaking speech to be effective, he had to be perceived as a messenger delivering God's "script," not an indignant black man inventing his own words.

The first technique that strengthened Douglass' messenger persona was his omnipresent, omniscient insights, the type of insights prophets often display. Throughout the course of his speech, Douglass displayed an almost mystical quality of being everywhere, at any time in history—a task not normally associated with "mere mortals." As the speech develops, we see Douglass in Philadelphia in 1776, on the battle field of the Revolutionary War, at the rivers of Babylon, at a slave market watching men sold like livestock, at the Potomac in Maryland, in New Orleans, at Fall's Point in Baltimore, in New York and Virginia, in Scotland and England, in white American churches, in Russia and Austria, with Thomas Jefferson, and finally ending up in Ethiopia and the Celestial Empire. By creating the illusion of being ubiquitous, of time-altering travel, Douglass also created an illusion of having been given supernatural qualities for the purpose of this speech. This power of course could only be granted by one being—the one force Douglass attributed everything to throughout his speech—God.

Douglass also strengthened his messenger persona through the repetitive and systematic use of scripture. This rhetorical technique subtly interwove the secular status of Douglass with the secret voice of God, ultimately elevating the former (Douglass ascends into the domain of the divine) while contextually connecting the latter (God's alignment with American abolitionism). Ergo both the abolitionist cause and Douglass' mortal status benefited from such a merger. For example, one finds such Biblical references diffused throughout the text as: "In a case like that, the dumb might eloquently speak and the lame man leap;" "Let there be light;" "Ethiopia shall stretch out her hand unto God;" "Trust no future, however pleasant;" "Let the dead past bury its dead;" "By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down;" "Yea! we wept when we remembered Zion;" "scribes, Pharisees, hypocrites, who pay tithe of mint, anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy and faith," "pure and undefiled religion;" "first pure, then peaceable, easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy."

In one of his more lengthy quotations, Douglass also incorporated a fellow prophet to support his claims:

> In the language of Isaiah, the American church might be well addressed, "Bring no more vain oblations; incense is an abomination unto me: the new moons and Sabbaths, the calling of assemblies, I cannot away with; it is iniquity, even the solemn meeting. ... I will not hear. Your hands are full of blood; cease to do evil, learn to do well; seek judgment; relieve the oppressed; judge for the fatherless; plead for the widow." (p. 145)

By using scripture with such repetition and fervor, Douglass not only strengthened his prophetic ethos, he also accomplished two additional goals. First, he supported his arguments with familiar and credible discourse—a necessity in the construction of sound, lucid

arguments. Second, he created an illusion that he was not just delivering his own diatribe, but that of his sender. As Margaret Zulick (1992) notes, "YHWH is shown to be the true agent of the prophetic word and the prophet is reduced to the status of agency, an unwilling instrument of the word" (p. 137). Ultimately, the messenger cannot be held personally responsible for the message.

A third factor that led to the audience's perception of Douglass as prophet was Douglass' overt claim of the personal presence of his sender. This claim reaches far past the common mortal realms of possibility. Douglass proclaims:

> **Standing with God** and the crushed and bleeding slave on this occasion, I will, in the name of humanity which is outraged, in the name of liberty which is fettered, in the name of the constitution and the Bible which are disregarded and trampled upon, dare to call in question and to denounce, with all the emphasis I can command, everything that serves to perpetuate slavery—the great sin and shame of America! (p. 137)

In the minds, myths, and beliefs of Douglass' Christian audience, the only people who actually work and "stand" with God are such messengers as Amos, Isaiah, Jeremiah—and now, perhaps, Douglass.

In developing this same theme, Douglass again claimed a direct and tactile connection with God. This time, however, he focuses on the divine repercussions he faces if he fails in his task as messenger. Douglass, borrowing from scripture, warned his audience:

> **If I do forget**, if I do not faithfully remember those bleeding children of sorrow this day, "may my right hand forget her cunning, and may my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth!" To forget them, to pass lightly over their wrongs and to chime in with the popular theme would be treason most scandalous and

> shocking and **would make me reproach before God.** My subject, then, fellow citizens, is American slavery. (p. 137)

By telling his audience that there is a coercive force behind the choice of the speech's content, he once again implies the presence and guidance of God. Furthermore, Douglass' "prophet persona" leaves open the possibility that he may not personally feel this harshly towards his white audience and America, but that it is God who is speaking. This helps explain how a black man in 1852 could successfully deliver such an acrimonious and discordant speech to a white audience. "Speaking for God," then, allowed Douglass to break the racial circumscriptions of 1852 and reprove his white audience for their political insouciance.

Finally, Douglass strengthened his credibility as a prophet through his remarkable rhetorical skills. Research has shown that one's communication competence has a direct bearing on one's perceived credibility.[10] As Phillip Foner has articulated, "Douglass was a man with few rhetorical equals" (1972, p. 126). The impact of his speaking was no doubt greatly magnified by the fact that Douglass was an ex-slave. Most audience members were overwhelmed to find out that a man so eloquent was once in chains. N.P. Rogers said, for example, that "Douglass has wit, argument, sarcasm, pathos ... and yet *surprisingly*, he has been but a few years out of the house of bondage" (1847, pp. 203-204). William Scarborough, president of Wilberforce College, expressed similar sentiments when he wrote, "The greatness of the man and the inspiration that comes from every word that he utters, makes one wonder with *amazement* how it was possible for such a remarkable character to have ever been a slave" (1893, p. 4). He was such a rhetorical aberration, in fact, that William Lloyd Garrison suggested he tell more personalized slave narratives and use "a little of the plantation speech" in order to convince his white audiences that he was indeed a runaway slave and not an abolitionist trick to solicit funds (Blassingame, 1979, p. xi). As these short excerpts support, audiences did not expect this, or any, "uneducated" black man to be

as eloquent as a Harvard-educated senator from the North. When a white audience, with their socially imposed bias, heard Douglass speak, they were forced to at least consider the possibility of divine intervention. What else could explain this miraculously gifted Negro to Rochester's white community but God's intervention?

Conclusion

This paper is used in order to explain how Douglass, a black man during slavery, was able to break the social and generic constraints of the day and still produce one of the greatest speeches of the nineteenth century. I have argued that the success of the Fourth of July oration was in part due to three factors: First, the speech's structural parallel with the book of *Amos* supplied a powerful persuasive template for the abolitionist cause. Second, Douglass' ability to create a messenger persona enabled the Amostic message to be perceived as authentic. Finally, the audience's faith in civil religion cultivated a belief that a prophetic visit was possible and warranted given that their "sin of slavery" broke the "transcendent moral law" and "sacred covenant" with God. These three factors elevated Douglass' speech into a higher realm of accountability. As a result, Douglass was free to break the "mortal" constraints of racial and rhetorical appropriateness. Douglass had become accountable to only God. As he claimed, "I do not obey the corrupt laws of man, I answer only to God." Consequently, Douglass' audience could not hold him personally culpable for the harshly castigating speech.

In comparison to the often-cited Jeremiad, the Amostic form is structurally different in three important ways. First, the Amostic form requires the orator to be from outside the reprimanded community. The Jeremiad, in contrast, necessitates the messenger to be part of the collective being addressed. Second, the Amostic form empowers the rhetor to predict God's future wrath. The Jeremiad prophet points to present catastrophes as signs of God's consternation. Finally, the Amostic form has a unique five-part arrangement that directly parallels Amos' narrative in the Old Testament.

The Jeremiad is far less exacting as to a message's disposition, only requiring that the warning move from sin to redemption to reform.

It is too early in this research to argue whether this Amostic strategy warrants "genre status."[11] While there has been significant work done on the use of the rhetorical Jeremiad, I have found no other mention of an alternative prophetic form used in secular, rhetorical forums. I will hazard to guess, however, that the use of this strategy is much more prevalent than just this one case study. A preliminary review suggests it to be a recurring rhetorical strategy throughout Douglass' career.

As a prescriptive tool, the Amostic form seems to be well suited for socially disempowered orators who find themselves outside the community they wish to castigate. This form would allow them to be bold, assertive, and more aggressive than under "normal" circumstances. It empowers the orator to borrow some of the ethos from God and apply it to a given situation. Also, the form is ideal in that it supplies the rhetors with a clear rhetorical strategy and method for motivating action. Namely, it tells audiences with obvious transgressions to "get right" or suffer spiritual and material reciprocity and leaves the listeners with hope and optimism about their salvation and restoration of a purer state.

There are two major prerequisites, however, that may inhibit the use of the Amostic form. First, the targeted culture must have a strong sense of civil religion. The inhabitants must conceive of themselves as a chosen people with a special mission to reform and control. Second, the audience being addressed must be familiar with the role of the social prophet. Without this knowledge it is impossible for the orator to be perceived as a prophet. As long as Americans are taught that the United States is a special society with a special mission and are familiar with a prophetic storyline, either formally through the institution of the church or informally through myths, the media, and social narratives, the inventional sources of Jeremiah, Moses, and Amos will continue to move, inspire, and provoke.

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Notes

[1]Specific demographic information on Douglass' audience is limited. One can resonably conclude, however, that some members of the Rochester audience were strong supporters of the abolitionist cause, familiar with the movement's recurring strategies, themes, and spokespeople. Many others, however, were simply curious citizens of Rochester who were drawn to the event because of its celebratory quality. Thus, while some members of the audience would have been familiar with Douglass and his bold rhetorical style, many would have been taken by surprise by the speech's tone and the rhetor's confidence.

[2]Until recently, this speech has been ignored by rhetorical scholars. However, in 1997, John Lucaites and James Jasinski consider the speech in Thomas W. Benson's *Rhetoric and Poltical Culture in Nineteenth-Century America*. Lucaites' analysis of Douglass' 1852 oration identifies the central dialectical tensions among past, present, and future as "an ironic embodiment and enactment of an inclusive conception of equality." Jasinski argues that Douglass' speech rearticulted the American Revolutionary experience in the ongoing effort to define the nation's character. While both are insightful, neither addresses the speech's prophetic qualities.

[3]As a boy, Douglass worked in Baltimore at the house of Hugh Auld where he enjoyed privileges and opportunities that were normally denied to plantation slaves. Mrs. Auld taught Douglass the fundamentals of reading and writing. His favorite book became *The Columbian Orator*, a collection of the western world's greatest speeches. Douglass remembered: "Every opportunity I got, I used to read this book ...The reading of these documents enabled me to utter my thoughts, and to meet the arguments brought forward to sustain slavery" (Douglass, *Narrative* pp. 43-44). When Mr. Auld discovered that his wife was educating Douglass, he forbade her to continue the unlawful instruction, saying that "learning would spoil the best nigger in the world" (Meyer, 1984, p. x). Auld was unsuccessful, however, in his attempt to keep Douglass passive and ignorant.

[4]For more insights into the philosophy of Garrison, see: *Selections from the Writings and Speeches of William Lloyd Garrison*. (1852). Boston, MA: J. B. Yerrinton and Sons Printers.

[5]Since America's embryonic days, this strategy has been adopted, modified, and applied to a myriad of occasions. It has been argued that the Jeremiad appeared during the American Revolution of 1776, the Franco-American Crisis of 1798, the expansion of the American West of the mid-1800s, and even in the

contemporary political addresses of Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson, Nixon, McGovern, Carter, and Reagan.

[6]David Howard-Pitney's *The Afro-American Jeremiad devotes two* chapters to Douglass' use of this pattern. While he makes reference to many of Douglass' salient works, e.g., *"Colored People Demand Respect," "Self-Help," "Why Is The Negro Lynched?," "The Color Line," and "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered,"* Howard-Pitney ignores the 1852 Fourth of July speech.

[7]Douglass left no record regarding specific rhetorical influences on the 1852 Independence Day speech. We know from his autobiographies that he often read and incorporated themes, stories, and quotations from the Old Testament into his speeches. From the similaires between the two works, however, there is strong evidence to support that Douglass was consciously or unconsciouly inspired by *Amos's* content and from.

[8]I have chosen Philip S. Foner's edition of Douglass' 1852, Fourth of July speech in, *The Voice of Black America, Vol. 1,* 126-151. It is one of the few sources that reproduces the speech in its unabridged and original form.

[9]These laws were passed to ensure that run-away slaves were returned to the southern "master." According to the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850, slaves were also denied all legal rights.

[10]See Gary Cronkhite and Jo Liska, "A Critique of Factor Analytic Approaches to the Study of Credibility," *Communication Monographs* 43 (1976): 91-107; and Aristotle, *Rhetoric* Book 2.1., trans. Lane Cooper (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1932), p. 92.

[11]Generic criticism has been long and widely accepted by rhetorical scholars. Genere, as defined by Karlyn Kohrs Campbell and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, means "a kind, a sort, a species, a category" of discourse that share "a common pragmatic ends and is typified by its substantive, stylistic, and strategic similarities" (1990, p. 7). Consequently, for there to be an "Amostic Genre," researchers would need to find recurring uses in the public spere of discourse that 1) attempt to bring around moral change, 2) call on a community to "get right with God" or suffer, 3) share a stylistic and substantive parallel with the book of *Amos*, and 4) follow the strategic five-part patterns found in Amos.

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Locus of Control, Parasocial Interaction and Usage of Radio or TV Ministry Programs

Philip J. Auter and Ray Lane Jr.

In this exploratory study, 191 students at a Deep Southern university were surveyed about their locus of control and use of religious media. Given that this was the first research into the relationship between this personality trait and religious media use, only research questions were advanced on this subject. Questions were raised as to whether internally or externally-oriented individuals would use religious media more extensively, have greater satisfaction with religious media, and be more likely to find these messages credible. Internals were found to gain more from religious media than did externals. Suggestions are made for the improved understanding of locus of control and religious belief. One hypothesis was stated on the indirectly related topic of the effect of a person's "parasociability" on the intensity of the perceived relationship with media ministers. Based on past research, it was predicted that someone who was highly "parasociable," would have a stronger parasocial interaction (PSI) relationship than an audience member that was less "parasociable." Results bore out this prediction.
Keywords: *Televangelist, TV Ministry, Locus of Control*

Introduction

Television and radio ministries have been around since the beginnings of electronic media. Many stations in the early days of radio were owned and operated by religious organizations. Radio programs like Rev. Charles Fuller's *Old-Fashioned Revival Hour* were broadcast on national radio in the 1940s (Buxton & Owen, 1972). About the time that radio was beginning to be supplanted by television in 1950, evangelist Billy Graham started to become nationally known on radio's *Hour of Decision* (Buxton & Owen). As the format-hungry medium of television became more