

# JustSouth Monthly

JSRI Perspectives on FAITH DOING JUSTICE

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## A Slave on the Fourth Frederick Douglass and the 4th of July

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### JSRI Upcoming Events

#### July 18-19

Fr. Kammer will lead workshops on social analysis for international Jesuit Volunteers at Scranton U.

#### July 19

JSRI staff will present at the annual conference of the Society of St. Teresa of Jesus.

#### July 27-28

Fr. Kammer will lead workshops on social analysis and Jesuit justice for the University Leaders' Summit of the Ignatian Solidarity Network.

#### August 1

JSRI welcomes Dr. Nicholas Mitchell to the JSRI staff.

### JSRI Recent Activities

#### July 11

JSRI released a [statement](#) on the contributions of refugees in the United States and Louisiana.

#### July 7

Ms. Donovan had a guest column published in *The Advocate* related to proposed federal regulations for predatory lending.

#### June 30

Ms. Baudouin and Dr. Weishar organized an NYC meeting of faith-based shareholders on human rights in private prisons.

#### June 17

Fr. Kammer led a strategic planning meeting in Baltimore for the Ignatian Solidarity Network.

#### June 16

Dr. Weishar helped organize the Community Input Session on the N.O. DA's youth transfer policies.

#### June 14

Fr. Kammer addressed the AJCU communications group concerning the mission of Jesuit education.

#### June 10

Dr. Weishar discussed the severe negative impact of adjudicating teens as adults on Christopher Sylvain's [Health Issues](#).



Last week, our nation celebrated the 240th anniversary of its independence. With that in mind, we propose to turn to Frederick Douglass' [famous speech](#) on July 5, 1852 – “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?” – to reflect upon the significance of this event. Below are excerpts of the speech with questions to prompt reflection on our nation's independence.

“This... is the 4th of July. It is the birthday of your National Independence, and of your political freedom. This, to you, is what the Passover was to the emancipated people of God. It carries your minds back to the day, and to the act of your great deliverance; and to the signs, and to the wonders, associated with that act, and that day.”

- How did I experience the Fourth of July? Was it a time of celebration for me? Was I proud of the United States?
- Do I think of our Independence as an “emancipation,” as a liberating event? How does it free me?

“Your high independence only reveals the immeasurable distance between us. The blessings in which you, this day, rejoice, are not enjoyed in common. — The rich inheritance of justice, liberty, prosperity and independence, bequeathed by your fathers, is shared by you, not by me. The sunlight that brought life and healing to you, has brought stripes and death to me. This Fourth [of] July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn.”

- Have I ever mourned on the Fourth of July? For whom did I mourn?
- Who in our time is denied the blessings of freedom?

“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 American slave-hunters. Many of its most eloquent Divines, who stand as the very lights of the church, have shamelessly given the sanction of religion and the Bible to the whole slave system. They have taught that man may, properly, be a slave; that the relation of master and slave is ordained of God; that to send back an escaped bondman to his master is clearly the duty of all the followers of the Lord Jesus Christ; and this horrible blasphemy is palmed off upon the world for Christianity.”

- What role does my church play in bringing others to freedom?
- In what ways is my church blind or apathetic to modern forms of slavery and suffering?

“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 of this country. There are forces in operation, which must inevitably work the downfall of slavery. “The arm of the Lord is not shortened,” and the doom of slavery is certain. I, therefore, leave off where I began, with hope.”

- Am I hopeful? Do I think positive change in the world is possible? Where do I find this hope?
- Do I practice mindfulness of this hope? If not, how can I?

If we take Douglass' message to heart, we will see that the Fourth of July is not really about the past: it's about the future. For while we rightly celebrate our independence, that achievement is incomplete. We are called to do more. That “more” is the task of the future, and the challenge that Douglass places before us.

**Monthly articles reflect the opinions of the authors and not necessarily those of Loyola University New Orleans.**

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