

Legends of Dissent: Frederick Douglass at the Tremont

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IT IS DECEMBER, 1860. LIGHT SNOW FALLS IN THE AIR AS THE TALL FIGURE OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS STRIDES ACROSS BOSTON COMMON TOWARD TREMONT BAPTIST CHURCH.



EXACTLY A YEAR EARLIER, JOHN BROWN HAD BEEN HUNG IN VIRGINIA AND LEADING PUBLIC FIGURES ARE GATHERING TO EULOGIZE HIM AND SPEAK ON THE ESSENTIAL QUESTION OF THOSE TIMES: "HOW CAN AMERICAN SLAVERY BE ABOLISHED?"

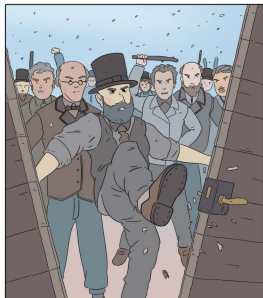


BUT THOUGH IT IS THE CRADLE OF AMERICAN FREEDOM, THERE ARE MANY IN BOSTON WHO WON'T TOLERATE THAT CONVERSATION. THEY INCLUDE ARISTOCRATIC MERCHANTS, DOCK WORKERS, AND EVEN HARVARD STUDENTS. AND THEY ARE HEADED TO TREMONT TOO, CARRYING CLUBS, SCOWLS, AND VICIOUS DETERMINATION TO SHUT DOWN THE DEBATE.

A SWIRLING THROG SURGES IN THE HALL AND AROUND THE STAGE. SOME WEAR TOP HATS AND FINE GLOVES, OTHERS WORK CAPS, BLACK, WHITE, IMMIGRANTS. IT IS A CROSS-SECTION OF AMERICAN LIFE.



DOUGLASS HAS TO SHOVE AND JOSTLE HIS WAY TO THE FRONT AND ASCEND THE STAGE. HE IS PULLED BY THE HAIR AND PUNCHED. BUT AFTER ESCAPING SLAVERY 20 YEARS EARLIER, HE IS NOT GOING TO LET ANYONE STOP HIM FROM SPEAKING.



THE FIRST SPEAKERS, ONE A WRITER AND ANOTHER A YOUNG CLERGYMAN ARE SHOUTED DOWN, HARASSED AND PULLED FROM THE PODIUM. ONE OF BOSTON'S LEADING JOURNALISTS, FRANKLIN SANBORN, LOOKS ON IN HORROR AND REMARKS:



ONLY DOUGLASS HAS THE SELF-BEARING AND A BOOMING VOICE LOUD ENOUGH TO EXCEED THE CHAOS.

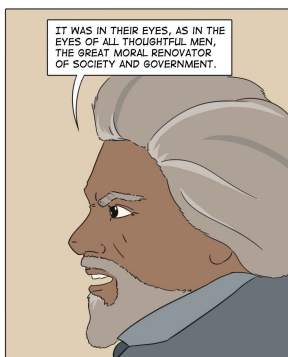
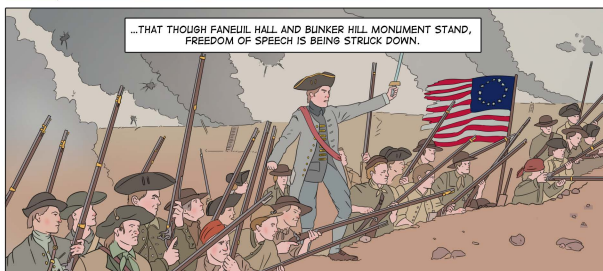
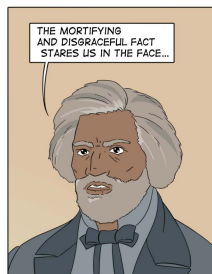
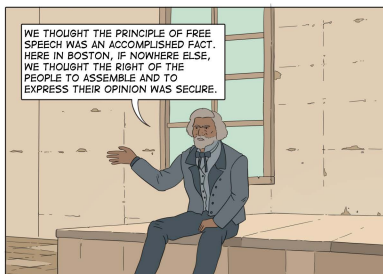


AT THAT, THE POLICE CONVERGED AND MANHANDLED DOUGLASS OUT OF THE HALL, ON ORDERS OF THE MAYOR HIMSELF. THE SCENE DESCENDS INTO A FULL DONNYBROOK.



BUT DOUGLASS WASN'T DONE. THAT EVENING, HE GATHERED SUPPORTERS AGAIN AT A SMALLER CHURCH, QUIET AND SERENE, AND HE SPOKE OF OUR MOST FUNDAMENTAL RIGHT, FREEDOM OF SPEECH.





DANIEL WEBSTER CALLED IT
A HOMEBRED RIGHT,
A FIRESIDE PRIVILEGE.



