

Columbian Orator Oratorical Tips

Caleb Bingham, *The Columbian Orator*, (Lincoln and Gleason, Hartford 1807)

Frederick Douglass managed to acquire a copy of the Columbian Orator while living as a slave in Baltimore, MD. Using this precious, secret copy he learned about debate and oratory, teaching himself the rudimentary skills that would one day make him famous. The first chapter of the book covers general advice on public speaking, and below are several excerpts from that section. The full text is available online through Google books.

The best judges among the ancients have represented Pronunciation... as the principal part of an orator's province; from whence he is chiefly to expect success in the art of persuasion. (pg 7)

The ancients make it one qualification of an orator, that he... make the cause he espouses his own; and the more sensibly he is touched with it himself... the more easily will he affect others. (pg 10)

In the words of Crassus... "The motions of the body ought to be suited to the expressions, not in a theatrical way, mimicking the words by particular gesticulations; but in a manner expressive of the general sense..." (pg 12)

The influence of sounds either to raise or allay our passions, is evident from music. And certainly the harmony of a fine discourse, well and gracefully pronounced, is as capable of moving us, if not in a way so violent and ecstatic, yet not less powerful, and more agreeable to our rational faculties.... Some persons continue a discourse in such a low and drawling manner, that they can scarcely be heard by their audience. Others again hurry on in so loud and boisterous a manner, as if they imagined their hearers were deaf. But all the music and harmony of voice lies between these extremes. (pg 13-14)

Perhaps nothing is of more importance to a speaker, than a proper attention to accent, emphasis, and cadence. Every word in our language, of more than one syllable, has, at least, one accented syllable.... By emphasis, we distinguish those words in a sentence which we esteem the most important, by laying a greater stress of voice upon them than we do upon the others. And it is surprising to observe how the sense of a phrase may be altered by varying the emphasis. The following example will serve as an illustration.

This short question, "Will you ride to town today?" may be understood in four different ways, and, consequently, may receive four different answers, according to the placing of the emphasis.

If it be pronounced thus; Will *you* ride to town to-day? The answer may properly be, No; I shall send my son. If thus; Will you *ride* to town to-day? Answer, No; I intend to walk. Will you ride to *town* to-day? No; I shall ride into the country. Will you ride to town *to-day*? No; but I shall to-morrow. (pg 14-15)

Nothing is less pleasing than a discourse pronounced throughout in one continued tone of the voice, without any alteration. (pg 16)

...It is necessary, not only that each word and syllable should have its just and full sound, both as to time and accent, but likewise that every sentence, and part of a sentence, should be separated by its proper pause. (pg 17)

The speaker should not long continue standing in the same position, like a statue, but be constantly changing, though the motion be very moderate. There ought to be no appearance of stiffness, but a certain ease and pliability... (pg 20)

...It is the countenance, that chiefly represents both the passions and the dispositions of the mind. By this we express love, hatred, joy, sorrow, modesty, and confidence; by this we supplicate, threaten, soothe, invite, forbid, consent, or refuse.... (pg 21)