

Posters left at Syracuse City Hall liken Colin Kaepernick to Frederick Douglass

Updated on October 2, 2017 at 5:26 PM Posted on October 2, 2017 at 4:53 PM

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Gallery: Frederick Douglass posters left at City Hall

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SYRACUSE, N.Y. -- A piece of local history and a reference to a modern controversy appeared mysteriously on the steps of City Hall Monday morning.

Seven posters citing the words of abolitionist Frederick Douglass, accompanied by a jersey of former NFL star Colin Kaepernick, were neatly arranged outside the building on East Washington Street.

"I know this kind of talk is not agreeable to what are called patriots. Indeed some have called me a traitor," the first poster reads. "I believe if I had a country, I should be a patriot."

The words on the posters pull from a Douglass speech called "Love of God, Love of Man, Love of Country," made on the steps of Syracuse City Hall on Sept. 24, 1847.

It was one of many speeches Douglass made in Syracuse as he toured the nation speaking against slavery and oppression. He frequently spoke on the anniversary of the Jerry Rescue (October 1, 1851), which is commemorated with a statue in Clinton Square nearby.

Ryan Powers made the signs. He said Douglass' speech is applicable still today and he hoped to see a statue of Douglass installed in front of City Hall to commemorate all the work he did in the area.

"A statue would build civic pride, and most important offer the attractive lesson to Syracusans that love of country should not come through blindfolded faith," Power said. "Rather each citizen should be scrupulous in criticism of country, work to change it, and if they come out their examination with love for country, then that love is coming from a citizen with the homage of reason, and that is a love worth more than the love of a lemming."

The posters appeared overnight Sunday. The final poster includes a photo of Douglass and a call to action: "Know Syracuse history; Make Syracuse a progressive hotbed again."

The logo of the Onondaga Historical Association is shown, but the OHA played no role in the display.

Gregg Tripoli, executive director of the OHA, said the photo of Douglass comes from their archives, but was used without permission. As a not-for-profit, the association doesn't get involved with social movements. Still, Tripoli said it was flattering that the author recognized the historical organization in its efforts to promote Syracuse history.

"We agree with that: 'Know your Syracuse history,'" Tripoli said, adding that "All press is good press."

Alexander Marion, a spokesman for the mayor's office, called the posters part of a long tradition of demonstrations of free speech at City Hall.

The display comes amid renewed controversy over NFL players, and others, kneeling during "The Star Spangled Banner." Kaepernick is credited with initiating the protests that have swept the NFL.

Last year, Kaepernick began kneeling during the national anthem in protest of racial oppression and inequality in the United States. He became an immediate lightning rod and, this year, found himself [out of a job](#).

ADVERTISING

At a rally in Alabama two weeks ago, President Donald Trump [alluded](#) to Kaepernick while stumping for a Congressional candidate.

"Wouldn't you love to see one of these NFL owners, when somebody disrespects our flag, you'd say, 'Get that son of a bitch off the field right now. Out! He's fired,'" Trump said.

Trump's comments revived the controversy and galvanized the nation. Many more players began [kneeling](#), sitting or otherwise protesting the anthem. Across the nation, people took sides and debates raged over the actions of the players and the words of the president.

Here is the full text of Douglass' quote on the posters, with the original emphasis included:

"I know this kind of talk is not agreeable to what are called patriots. Indeed some have called me a traitor...Two things are necessary to make a traitor. One is, he shall have a country. **I believe if I had a country, I should be a patriot...** I can look with some admiration on your wide lakes, your fertile fields, your enterprise, your industry, your many lovely institutions. I can read with pleasure your constitution to establish justice and secure the blessings of liberty to posterity. Those are precious sayings to my mind.

But when I remember that the blood of four sisters and one brother is making fat the soil of Maryland and Virginia -- when I remember that an aged grandmother...reared twelve children for the southern [slave] market, and these one after another...were torn from her bosom -- when I remember that when she became too much racked for toil, she was turned out by a professed Christian master to grope her way in the darkness of old age, literally to die with none to help her and the institutions of this country sanctioning and sanctifying this crime, I have no words of eulogy, I have no patriotism. **How can I love a country where the blood of my own blood, the flesh of my own flesh, is now toiling under a lash?** ...No, I make no pretention to patriotism. So long as my voice can be heard...I will hold up America to the lightning scorn of moral indignation. In doing this, I shall feel myself discharging the duty of a **true patriot; for he is a lover of his country who rebukes and does not excuse its sins.**"