

Slavery & The Ethics of the Oppressed

Debates in Black Political Thought -- Spring 2026

Moral Reasoning under Enslavement

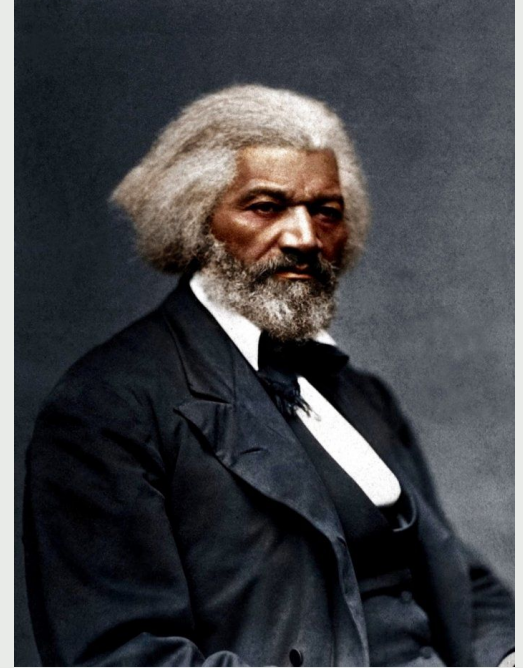
How should one live?

What conduct and attitudes does morality require of each of us?

What are the essential elements on a worthwhile life?

What would constitute a morally responsible & dignified response on the part of the oppressed to intractable, oppressive conditions?

Portraits of Resistance



Small Groups

Strategist

Identify 2-3 moments from the text where your figure *faces a choice* and you can see the stakes clearly. Don't explain the choice yet—just present the moment and what was at risk.

Philosopher

Find the language, reasoning, or values your figure invokes (explicitly or implicitly) to justify their approach. Look for what they *claim matters most*—family, freedom, collective action, moral principle, survival, dignity. You'll use this to explain

Critic

Find moments where the strategy breaks down, contradicts itself, or requires sacrifice. What does this approach *cost*? What doesn't it solve? Where do you see genuine limits, not failures?

Presenter

Listen to A, B, and C as they work. Track the conversation. Your job is to synthesize what the group discovers and present it clearly to the whole class in 2 minutes. Make sure the presentation shows: (1) the core strategic choice, (2) the reasoning behind it, (3) the tension or cost it creates.

Where do you see tensions between the figures we've studied so far? Where do you see alignment?

Where do figures share values but pursue them differently?

Which approach teaches us the most about what it means to live responsibly under oppression?

Moral Reasoning, revisited

Based on what you've heard today,
answer for yourself...

What constitutes a morally responsible
and dignified response to intractable
oppression?

Self-Assessment

1 = In Progress

2 = Consistent

3 = Sophisticated

DEEP READING (25%)

- I cited specific passages and explained their significance
- I distinguished between explicit arguments and underlying assumptions
- My evidence directly supported my claims about resistance

COMPARATIVE THINKING (25%)

- I explained how figures related to each other—agreements and divergences
- I identified patterns and tensions across thinkers
- I named what each approach illuminated or left unresolved

CHARITABLE ENGAGEMENT (25%)

- I explained why each figure's approach made sense in their historical moment
- I described the problem they were solving and what was at stake
- I avoided anachronistic readings that distort their position

INTELLECTUAL HONESTY (25%)

- I acknowledged contradictions and unresolved tensions
- I genuinely responded to peer contributions—revising, pushing back, or building on ideas
- I held multiple answers rather than seeking a single solution