

Segregation in Public Life & Frederick Douglass

In 1872, famous author and orator, Frederick Douglass stopped in Carlisle while on a speaking tour. Douglass had been a part of an expedition appointed by President Grant to determine if San Domingo should be annexed as a new territory of the United States. Within his speech, he made a point to call out the racism within Carlisle and communities like Carlisle.

Unfortunately, Douglass was treated poorly during his time in Carlisle. For instance, while staying at the Bentz House Hotel (later the Worthington) on East High Street, he was informed that he had to take his meals in his room and not the dining room where the white guests were eating. The American Volunteer reported, "...he was the only colored man in the party, but yet notwithstanding his color, he was recognized in every respect, as an equal. He ate at the same table with the Commissioners, occupied the same stateroom in the ship's cabin, and in San Domingo occupied the same sleeping apartments." "...But here in Carlisle, as well as in some other towns," remarked the speaker (Douglass), "I am not treated in this way; here caste is still recognized; here a man is denied certain privileges because of his color."

Douglass was correct to call out Carlisle. Not only were schools openly segregated, Carlisle businesses perpetuated public segregation almost a century after Douglass visited the community. Restaurants banned people of color from entering their doors or provided a separate entrance to walk into the building. In the what is known as the Carlisle Theatre today, people of color were banned to the balcony. These separations were still happening into the 1960s.