

THE FACULTY VOICE

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Volume 1 / Issue 1

FEBRUARY 2020



POWER IN THE WORDS OF FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Born in 1818, Frederick Douglass escaped from slavery and ultimately became a highly influential person in the abolitionist movement, going on to become known internationally for his oratory and diplomatic skills.

At Montague House, on the wall of the Grievance Officer's workspace, is a large poster entitled "The Limits of Tyrants" which lists six quotations attributed to Mr. Douglass. I see them every time I walk into my office, and I'm always struck by how broadly applicable they are, despite being over one hundred years old.

As we begin negotiations this year for the next contract, two statements in particular seem particularly relevant:

Power concedes nothing without a demand; it never has, and it never will. Find out what the people will submit to, and you have found out the exact amount of injustice which will be imposed on them.

I do not know the origins of this poster, or how many of my hard-working and dedicated predecessors have also sat and pondered the meaning and relevance of these statements. I do know that, like myself, many of my colleagues have a preference to keep their head down and simply plow through their work, doing the best they can each semester with limited tools and support. It is only when the approximately 900 of us represented by this union agree to work together that we are the most effective at having our voices heard - and with all of us (including the university) facing continued challenges, it is more important than ever to not simply shrug and hope for the best, but rather stay firm and insist that we faculty - the lifeblood of this institution - receive the support, tools and compensation we need and deserve in order to be effective.

Steve Durbin, Grievance Officer, WMU-AAUP