

# Why Taxation is Slavery: Words from Frederick Douglass

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What do you call it when someone takes 100% of your labor by force? Slavery.

Slavery is being forced to work against your will for the benefit of your master, your owner. The only reason they own the products of your labor is because they own you. If you had exclusive control over what is done to and with your body, [the most basic right of self-ownership](#), you would not owe anybody your labor.

So then a lesser percentage of forced labor is also slavery, though to an obviously lesser degree.

Whether a cent or a million dollars is taken without consent, it is theft. And if someone forces you to work for them 1% of the time, or 100% of a time, that is still slavery.

Frederick Douglass was a slave, by any reckoning. So it is interesting to [read his own words](#), on having his rightfully earned wages taken by force. In his book [My Bondage and My Freedom](#), Douglass laments the state of his servitude, that all his hard work is confiscated from him.

*Besides, I was now getting—as I have said—a dollar and fifty cents per day. I contracted for it, worked for it, earned it, collected it; it was paid to me, and it was rightfully my own; and yet, upon every returning Saturday night, this money—my own hard earnings, every cent of it—was demanded of*

*me, and taken from me by Master Hugh. He did not earn it; he had no hand in earning it; why, then, should he have it? I owed him nothing. He had given me no schooling, and I had received from him only my food and raiment; and for these, my services were supposed to pay, from the first. The right to take my earnings, was the right of the robber. He had the power to compel me to give him the fruits of my labor, and this power was his only right in the case. I became more and more dissatisfied with this state of things...*

Frederick Douglass sees correctly that the only “right” the government has to take your money, is the right of the robber. Yes, they have enough power to force you to give them money, and that is the only thing that makes it “legitimate”. Certainly no one argues that his slavery was justified by the food and shelter his master provided him.

Douglass then muses about what conditions make slave-masters able to keep men enslaved.

*To make a contented slave, you must make a thoughtless one. It is necessary to darken his moral and mental vision, and, as far as possible, to annihilate his power of reason. He must be able to detect no inconsistencies in slavery. The man that takes his earnings, must be able to convince him that he has a perfect right to do so. It must not depend upon mere force; the slave must know no Higher Law than his master's will. The whole relationship must not only demonstrate, to his mind, its necessity, but its absolute rightfulness. If there be one crevice through which a single drop can fall, it will certainly rust off the slave's chain.*

And this is the same reason people accept taxation. We revere authority and accept government as necessary, and believe we get some benefit out of our slavery.

How often do you hear people support something because “it is

the law."Is there no higher law than that which the government makes up for its own benefit, and then exerts through force? The force of government is the highest law we know.

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But as soon as we realize that it is never okay to be robbed, no matter how small, the injustice is a potent demonstration that we are at the mercy of a thieving gang who has convinced most people that somehow, in *this case*, theft and slavery are acceptable.

In case you are hung up on the *percentage* of stolen labor: it is interesting to note that [Frederick Douglass](#) did not always have 100% of his wages stolen from him by his masters.

*I could see no reason why I should, at the end of each week, pour the reward of my toil into the purse of my master. When I carried to him my weekly wages, he would, after counting the money, look me in the face with a robber-like fierceness, and ask, "Is this all?" He was satisfied with nothing less than the last cent. He would, however, when I made him six dollars, sometimes give me six cents, to encourage me. It had the opposite effect. I regarded it as a sort of admission of my right to the whole. The fact that he gave me any part of my wages was proof, to my mind, that he believed me entitled to the whole of them. I always felt worse for having received any thing; for I feared that the giving me a few cents would ease his conscience, and make him feel himself to be a pretty honorable sort of robber.*

How often do people squeal that the rich need to pay their ["fair share"](#)? It doesn't matter how much any person earns, the government always wants to steal more. And somehow they have convinced millions of people that the thieves are the good guys, and the wage earners *deserve* to be enslaved and robbed.

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