

Liberty & Revolution

a PPE Speaker Series, 2013–2014

*

University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Peter C. Myers

“The Problem of Revolution and Liberty:
Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King, Jr.”

February 18th, Hyde Hall—Incubator Room

5:30 – 7:00 PM

Abstract: The problematic relation of revolution to liberty—the problem of so conducting an effort to overthrow an unjust order as to prepare society’s reconstitution on grounds of equal, ordered liberty—was a preoccupation for the two greatest exemplars of the revolutionary spirit in black American history, Frederick Douglass and Martin Luther King, Jr. Both affirmed the higher-law principles informing the Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution, both conceived of the black American struggle to secure the blessings of liberty for all Americans irrespective of race as a grand, revolutionary cause, and both were concerned about the proneness of the revolutionary spirit to dangerous excess. With respect to the specific meaning of revolution and the practical conditions of liberty, however, they differ significantly. This paper will explicate and assess Douglass’s and King’s respective arguments, and, in particular by exploring their differences, to gain insight into the complexity and difficulty of the general problem of revolution and liberty.

Peter C. Myers is Professor of Political Science, specializing in political philosophy and U.S. constitutional law, at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire. He is the author of *Our Only Star and Compass: Locke on the Struggle for Political Rationality* and *Frederick Douglass: Race and the Rebirth of American Liberalism*.

Questions may be directed to Alexander Jech, series organizer, at awjjech@email.unc.edu 574-850-8241.

This is the third lecture in the PPE Liberty & Revolution Speaker Series.

Our final speaker will be Philip Pettit on April 14th.

