



Legislation Text

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Res. No. 390

Resolution declaring the month of July "Frederick Douglass Month," honoring the prominent African-American orator, journalist, and anti-slavery leader who delivered an address on July 4, 1852, entitled, "What to the Slaves is the Fourth of July?"

By Council Members Seabrook, Baez, Barron, Clarke, Comrie, Felder, Gerson, Jackson, Lopez, Perkins, Reed, Sanders, Serrano, Stewart, Vann and Weprin; also Council Members Boyland and Quinn.

Whereas, Frederick Douglass, whose original name was Frederick Augustus Bailey, was born in 1817 in Talbot County, Maryland to a black slave, Harriet Bailey and an unknown white father; and

Whereas, Mr. Douglass went on to become the most prominent African- American orator, journalist, and anti-slavery leader of the 19th century; and

Whereas, After learning basic literary skills as a child, at the age of 13 Mr. Douglass bought his first book entitled, The Columbian Orator, a book that convinced Mr. Douglass of the injustice of slavery and the right of all people to be free; and

Whereas, In 1845, Mr. Douglass published his first autobiography entitled, the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, a narrative which was one of the most effective accounts written by a fugitive slave, and became a major source of information about slavery and a classic piece of American literature; and

Whereas, After spending two years in England, Mr. Douglass returned to the United States in 1847 as a free man after some of his British friends purchased his freedom; and

Whereas, Upon his return to the United States, Mr. Douglass started publishing a weekly newspaper called The North Star, which later became Frederick Douglass' Weekly, a newspaper that was managed and edited solely by blacks in order to disprove the pro-slavery argument that blacks were "naturally inferior;" and

Whereas, From 1847 through 1863, Mr. Douglass continuously published his newspapers, which also included Douglass' Monthly, where he championed the rights of free blacks and slaves and supported a number of other causes, most notably women's rights; and

Whereas, From 1840 through the 1850's, Mr. Douglass worked closely with the anti-slavery Liberty Party, a party that he helped organized, which called for the election of abolitionists to public office and demanded the total destruction of slavery; and

Whereas, Since Mr. Douglass believed in the right of slaves to rebel and the right of fugitives to resist reenslavement, his house in Rochester, New York was used as a station of the Underground Railroad, a network of anti-slavery activists who helped smuggle slaves from the south safely to the north and Canada; and

Whereas, On July 4, 1852, Mr. Douglass delivered an Independence Day Address entitled, "What to the Slaves is the Fourth of July?" an address which commemorated the coming of independence to the United States, and which focused on the topic of "American Slavery;" and

Whereas, In his Independence Day Address, Mr. Douglass lost little time in laying bare the contradiction inherent in allowing slavery to exist within a society professedly dedicated to individual freedom, stating that to the American slave the Fourth of July reveals "to him the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim;" and

Whereas, During the Civil War, Mr. Douglass argued that slavery was the true cause of the conflict and that the union should make the abolition of slavery its primary focus; and

Whereas, Mr. Douglass also called for the Union Army to recruit slaves and free blacks, helping to raise two regiments of black soldiers, the Massachusetts 54th and 55th, and his own sons Frederick and Lewis were among the first to volunteer for these all black regiments; and

Whereas, During the Reconstruction Era after the Civil War, Mr. Douglass campaigned for suffrage and civil rights for all blacks, becoming a spokesperson for improving the situations of former slaves; and

Whereas, Mr. Douglass also worked for the passage of the 13th, 14th, and 15th amendments which abolished slavery, made all people born in the United States citizens and prohibited racial discrimination in voting; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York declares the month of July "Frederick Douglass Month," honoring the prominent African-American orator, journalist, and anti-slavery leader who delivered an address on July 4, 1852, entitled, "What to the Slaves is the Fourth of July?"

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