



## **Communal Reading of Frederick Douglass's Speech and the U.S. Declaration of Independence on July 2**

**Cambridge, MA, June 28, 2020** -- The Cambridge Public Library will host a virtual communal reading of Frederick Douglass's speech, *What to the Slave is the Fourth of July*, and the U.S. Declaration of Independence, on Wednesday, July 2, at 5:30 p.m. The virtual event is co-sponsored by the Office of Mayor Sumbul Siddiqui and City Manager Louis A. DePasquale. Community members are invited to sign-up to read excerpts from both or to view and listen to the reading.

*What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July* is a speech that abolitionist leader Frederick Douglass gave at an Independence Day celebration in Rochester, New York on July 5, 1852. Douglass, who had escaped slavery in 1838, was invited to speak in Rochester by the Women's Abolitionist League of Rochester, New York.

The U.S. Declaration of Independence was adopted by the Continental Congress in Philadelphia on July 4, 1776. The Preamble of the Declaration lists inalienable rights, and the main document, a list of grievances for which the 13 colonies wanted independence from Great Britain. The U.S. Declaration of Independence did not address slavery and its claims of inalienable rights did not extend to slaves. When the document was adopted, slavery was legal in all colonies and many of the signatories of the Declaration were slave owners.

*What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July* highlighted the contradictions of the U.S. Declaration of Independence. In the speech, Douglass laments that the rights so eloquently espoused in the Preamble of the U.S. Declaration of Independence did not apply to slaves. In Douglass's view, the 4th of July is not a day worthy of celebration for the slave because it is "...a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim." 168 years after Douglass gave his speech, the rights and privileges of citizenship remain elusive to many Black Americans.

Community members interested in participating in the program are [welcome to register](#). Community interested in reading excerpts may indicate so using the dropdown menu on the registration form.

### **About the Cambridge Public Library:**

At the Cambridge Public Library, we welcome all, inspire minds and empower community.

We support a Cambridge where everyone has equitable opportunities to learn, people live their best lives, and democracy thrives. During the Covid-19 health crisis, we are offering a variety of programs and services. [Visit our website](#) to learn the details.

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