

**BY:** Senator KENNEDY

**COMMEMORATING** the 175th Anniversary of Frederick Douglass's visit to Ireland, and his many contributions to the International community

**WHEREAS,** It is the sense of this Legislative Body to recognize important events which remind us of the rich and diverse heritage of our great State and Nation; and

**WHEREAS,** This Legislative Body is justly proud to commemorate the 175th Anniversary of Frederick Douglass's visit to Ireland, and his many contributions to the International community; and

**WHEREAS,** Black History Month is a time to reflect on the struggles and victories of African Americans throughout our country's history and to recognize their numerous valuable contributions to the protection of our democratic society in times of war and in peace; and

**WHEREAS,** As a fitting observance of February each year being proclaimed as Black History Month, we honor the life and contribution of Frederick Douglass, freeman and adopted son of Eire, who was born on February 14, 1818; and

**WHEREAS,** Frederick Douglass was advised to flee the United States to Britain and Ireland following the Spring of 1845 release of his book **Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave;** and

**WHEREAS,** He had escaped his bondage in Maryland in 1837, and soon found his way to the free soil of Massachusetts; two years later, by then married and having started a family, Frederick Douglass had established himself as a gifted orator on the abolitionist speaking circuit; and

**WHEREAS,** Under the sponsorship of William Lloyd Garrison's American Anti-Slavery Society, Frederick Douglass traveled the states of the North, railing against human bondage and demanding that it be outlawed, activities which sparked frequent threats against him; and

**WHEREAS,** Frederick Douglass had developed an amazing influence, especially among anti-slavery advocates and became the voice of his fellow slaves still trapped in this ungodly institution; and

**WHEREAS,** His capture or death would have been a catastrophe for the anti-slavery campaign; no one else could bear such a powerful witness to the evils of slavery as Frederick Douglass; and

**WHEREAS,** The outstanding Black figure of the 19th Century, Frederick Douglass was a target for every slave catcher and racist slave owner; it was no surprise his book's release was explosive and created huge hostilities; and

**WHEREAS,** In August of 1845, former slave Frederick Douglass set sail from Boston for a two-year lecture tour of the British Isles, commencing with four months in Ireland, including a meeting with Irish nationalist leader Daniel O'Connell, that would have a transformative effect on the famous abolitionist's subsequent life and career; and

**WHEREAS,** His extraordinary tour of the United Kingdom and Ireland was arranged primarily to escape the increased threats of kidnapping and bodily harm brought on by the publication of his best-selling autobiography; and

**WHEREAS,** The United Kingdom was a sensible enough destination for an abolitionist campaigner; in 1807, Parliament had prohibited any British involvement in the slave trade and then, in 1833, outlawed the practice itself in most of the empire's overseas colonies; and

**WHEREAS,** Frederick Douglass found Dublin to be a welcoming place where he was no longer a piece of property but a rightful man; at 27-years old, he had a striking appearance with broad shoulders and standing over six feet tall; and

**WHEREAS,** When he arrived at the home of his Dublin publisher, Frederick Douglass was met with courtesy and deference befitting an international celebrity; and

**WHEREAS,** While in Ireland from 1845-1846, Frederick Douglass found his own voice. "I can truly say," he wrote home as he completed his travels there, "I have spent some of the happiest moments of my life since landing in this country, I seem to have undergone a transformation. I live a new life."; and

**WHEREAS,** After landing in Liverpool, Frederick Douglass and his white traveling companion, fellow abolitionist James Buffum, were to ferry across the Irish Sea to Dublin; there they would commence Frederick Douglass's lecture tour; and

**WHEREAS,** While in Ireland, he also worked with Richard Webb, a Dublin printer, to publish a British Isles edition of **Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American slave**; and

**WHEREAS,** A highlight of his stay was meeting his hero, the Irish nationalist, and abolitionist, Daniel O'Connell; it was Douglass's brief acquaintance with Daniel O'Connell - "Ireland's truest son," just turned 70, who "had adventured his life for proper freedom" - that opens his mind to the possibility of universal human rights; and

**WHEREAS,** The Great Liberator, Daniel O'Connell was unique in being utterly against slavery; Frederick Douglass attended one of O'Connell's mass meetings and was transfixed by his speech; and

**WHEREAS,** At a rally in Dublin, Frederick Douglass was brought onstage and introduced by the Great Liberator himself as "the black O'Connell"; and

**WHEREAS,** As the tour progressed, Frederick Douglass anticipated, correctly as it turned out, that newspaper coverage of his passage through Ireland and Great Britain would increase his stature as an international celebrity; and that publicity in foreign newspapers, refracted by the US press, would exponentially increase his renown in America: "My words, feeble as they are when spoken at home," he told an

audience in Cork, "will wax stronger in proportion to the distance I go from home, as a lever gains power by its distance from the fulcrum"; and

**WHEREAS,** As Frederick Douglass toured Ireland, a potato crop failure was shadowing the already impoverished island, a ruined harvest that would soon transmogrify into a catastrophe of unparalleled suffering, ruin, death, and the diaspora; confronting that poverty, he, writing home, noted that he found "much here to remind me of my former condition"; and

**WHEREAS,** Frederick Douglass's tour consisted of extended stays, for multiple lectures, in Dublin, Cork, Limerick and Belfast; he also made brief stops in Wexford and Waterford; and

**WHEREAS,** His book, as it happened, had been published two months before Frederick Douglass's British Isles tour; in Ireland, as planned, he oversaw the publication of a British Isles edition of his book; and

**WHEREAS,** Equally important, the tour accelerated Frederick Douglass's transformation from more than a teller of his own life-story into a commentator on contemporary issues, a transition discouraged during his early lecturing days by white colleagues at the American Anti-Slavery Society; and

**WHEREAS,** After he returned to America, Frederick Douglass resumed his fight against American slavery in the South and for full civil rights for black people living in the North; and

**WHEREAS,** In that latter effort, Irish-Americans of the North's cities often numbered among his staunchest opponents; in May of 1863, speaking in Brooklyn, he observed, "I am told that the Irish element in this country is exceedingly strong, and that that element will never allow colored men to stand upon an equal political footing with white men. I am pointed to the terrible outrages committed from time to time by Irishmen upon negroes. The mobs at Detroit, Chicago, Cincinnati, and New York are cited as proving the unconquerable aversion of the Irish toward the colored race."; and

**WHEREAS,** Even so, to the end of his life, Frederick Douglass fondly remembered his 1840s lecture tour of Ireland and the welcoming reception he had been accorded; and though many Irish-Americans often opposed his civil rights efforts, he also viewed the Irish, in both Ireland and America, as a persecuted people; he even saw parallels between their plight and that of African Americans; and

**WHEREAS,** Throughout his career, Frederick Douglass often invoked Daniel O'Connell and his struggles on behalf of Ireland as a cautionary tale for African Americans and, more broadly, the United States; and

**WHEREAS**, In 1867, Frederick Douglass, in an Atlantic Monthly article observed that "what O'Connell said of the history of Ireland may with greater truth be said of the negro's. It may be 'traced like a wounded man through a crowd, by the blood."; and

**WHEREAS**, Moreover, during his sojourn in Ireland, Frederick Douglass had honed habits of independence, discretion, compromise, self-reliance and practical politics which served him over the coming decades; eventually these behaviors empowered him to play his career's most

defining role on the stage of world history-providing counsel for and assisting President Abraham Lincoln's elevation of the United States military's actions during the American civil war from a campaign to preserve the Union to a moral cause devoted to vanquishing American slavery; and

**WHEREAS**, Before leaving Belfast and Ireland on January 1, 1846, Frederick Douglass wrote his impressions of Ireland to William Lloyd Garrison: "My opportunities for learning the character and condition of the people of this land have been very great. I have traveled almost from the hill of 'Howth' to the Giant's Causeway and from the Giant's Causeway to Cape Clear."; he eventually wrote about his escape to Ireland in his later literary works; and

**WHEREAS**, Frederick Douglass died on February 20, 1895, in Washington, D.C.; and

**WHEREAS**, It is important to recall and honor individuals such as Frederick Douglass, longtime New York State resident, fittingly recognizing their valued contributions and publicly acknowledging their endeavors which have enhanced the basic humanity among us all; now, therefore, be it

**RESOLVED**, That this Legislative Body pause in its deliberations to commemorate the 175th Anniversary of Frederick Douglass's visit to Ireland, and his many contributions to the International community.