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Marking time with Frederick Douglass

The 'colored' women of Pittsburgh celebrated the legacy of the preeminent abolitionist with a gift of hope, recounts writer **MARK HOLAN**

My face marks the sunny hours. What can you say of yours?

— Inscription on a sundial at Frederick Douglass' house in Washington, D.C., donated by the Married Women's Culture Club of Pittsburgh

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WASHINGTON, D.C.

This year is the bicentennial of the birth of abolitionist, social reformer, writer and orator Frederick Douglass, though the exact date is unknown due to his life's origins in slavery.

The house in Washington, D.C.'s Anacostia neighborhood where he spent the last 18 years of his life as a free man and elder statesman is among several historic sites associated with Douglass. Known as Cedar Hill, it is located 3 miles from the U.S. Capitol, with spectacular views from the summit of the property of the Capitol dome and Washington Monument.

On Aug. 12, 1922, the Douglass house formally became a national museum. As the Washington Star suggested at the time, "Cedar Hill, as dedicated yesterday, will be to the colored people something what Mount Vernon is to the nation at large," a reference to the Virginia estate of George Washington, which offers hilltop views of the Potomac River 18 miles south of the District.

African-American educator and activist Nannie Helen Burroughs later made the same connection, though more inclusively. In 1935, she wrote: "If people loved and desired to cherish the name of Frederick Douglass, they would make that 14-acre plot known as 'Cedar Hill' look like Mount Vernon. Washington fought for liberty for the colonists. Douglass fought for freedom for the slaves.

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