

118TH CONGRESS
2D SESSION

H. R. 7378

To award posthumously a Congressional Gold Medal to Frederick Douglass in recognition of his contributions to the cause of freedom, human rights, and the abolition of slavery in the United States.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FEBRUARY 15, 2024

Mr. IVEY (for himself, Mr. HARRIS, Ms. ADAMS, Mr. ARMSTRONG, Ms. BARRAGÁN, Mrs. BEATTY, Ms. BROWN, Mr. CARBAJAL, Mr. CARSON, Mr. CARTER of Louisiana, Mrs. CHERFILUS-McCORMICK, Ms. CHU, Ms. CLARKE of New York, Mr. CORREA, Ms. CROCKETT, Mr. DAVIS of Illinois, Ms. ESCOBAR, Mr. ESPAILLAT, Mr. EVANS, Mr. FITZPATRICK, Mrs. FOUSHEE, Mr. GOLDMAN of New York, Mr. GOTTHEIMER, Mr. GREEN of Texas, Mr. HORSFORD, Mr. HOYER, Ms. JACKSON LEE, Mr. JOHNSON of Georgia, Ms. KELLY of Illinois, Mr. KHANNA, Mr. KIM of New Jersey, Ms. KUSTER, Mr. LAWLER, Ms. LEE of California, Ms. McCLELLAN, Mr. MFUME, Ms. MOORE of Wisconsin, Mr. MULLIN, Mrs. NAPOLITANO, Ms. NORTON, Ms. OCASIO-CORTEZ, Ms. PLASKETT, Ms. PRESSLEY, Mr. RASKIN, Mr. RUPPERSBERGER, Ms. SALAZAR, Ms. SALINAS, Ms. SÁNCHEZ, Ms. SCHAKOWSKY, Mr. SCHIFF, Mr. SCOTT of Virginia, Ms. SEWELL, Mr. SMITH of New Jersey, Ms. STEVENS, Mr. THANEDAR, Ms. TITUS, Ms. TLAIB, Mr. TRONE, Mr. VARGAS, Mrs. WATSON COLEMAN, Ms. WILLIAMS of Georgia, Ms. WILSON of Florida, and Ms. DAVIDS of Kansas) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on Financial Services, and in addition to the Committee on House Administration, for a period to be subsequently determined by the Speaker, in each case for consideration of such provisions as fall within the jurisdiction of the committee concerned

A BILL

To award posthumously a Congressional Gold Medal to Frederick Douglass in recognition of his contributions to the

cause of freedom, human rights, and the abolition of slavery in the United States.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 **SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.**

4 This Act may be cited as the “Frederick Douglass
5 Congressional Gold Medal Act”.

6 **SEC. 2. FINDINGS.**

7 Congress finds the following:

8 (1) Frederick Douglass overcame the harrowing
9 circumstances of slavery to become one of America’s
10 most prominent and influential figures as an aboli-
11 tionist, journalist, and activist. He used his voice
12 and influence to advocate for the end of slavery, the
13 advancement of civil rights, and the right of black
14 men to vote.

15 (2) Frederick Douglass was born into slavery in
16 February 1818 in the northeast corner of Talbot
17 County near the town of Queen Anne. At age 6,
18 Frederick Douglass began laboring at the wheat
19 plantation of Colonel Edward Lloyd. He was soon
20 transferred to Baltimore, where he worked for 7
21 years in the residence of Hugh and Sophia Auld.

22 (3) Despite laws that prohibited literacy of
23 enslaved individuals, Frederick Douglass secretly
24 taught himself to read and write by examining dis-

1 carded newspapers and studying books on rhetoric,
2 mastering the style of the time period. On literacy,
3 Douglass was clear, stating: “Once you learn to
4 read, you will be forever free.”, and that “Knowl-
5 edge makes a man unfit to be a slave.”.

6 (4) Douglass moved to a plantation near St.
7 Michael, Maryland, where he started a secret school
8 for slaves that was later broken up by an angry mob
9 of white townspeople. As punishment, Douglass was
10 loaned out to a local farmer with a reputation as a
11 “slave breaker”. Undaunted, Douglass started an-
12 other school for slaves and began plotting to escape
13 and liberate himself from slavery.

14 (5) Sent back to the Auld residence in Balti-
15 more, Douglass unsuccessfully attempted to buy his
16 freedom, and instead escaped in 1838 at the age of
17 20. Speaking of his freedom, Douglass said, “I
18 prayed for freedom for twenty years, but received no
19 answer until I prayed with my legs.”. He traveled to
20 New York where he worked on whaling ships while
21 avoiding slave catchers. He adopted the surname
22 “Douglass” on the suggestion of his friend, Nathan
23 Johnson, who was inspired by a character in Sir
24 Walter Scott’s poem *The Lady of the Lake*.

1 (6) Speaking at the August 1841 convention of
2 the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society on Nan-
3 tucket Island, Douglass garnered the attention of
4 leading abolitionists, catapulting him into a speaking
5 tour of northern states, where he and his fellow
6 speakers often endured verbal and physical abuse.

7 (7) Douglass supported women’s rights. He at-
8 tended the renowned Seneca Falls Convention in
9 1848, supporting the inclusion of a landmark resolu-
10 tion that demanded the right for all women to vote.

11 (8) His groundbreaking autobiographies, includ-
12 ing “Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an
13 American Slave” (1845), “My Bondage and My
14 Freedom” (1855), and “Life and Times of Fred-
15 erick Douglass” (1881), provided detailed accounts
16 of the life of an enslaved individual, the struggles to
17 escape, and the fight for freedom. His abolitionist
18 newspaper, the “North Star”, promoted freedom for
19 slaves domestically and abroad. These writings not
20 only exposed the brutalities of slavery, but also dis-
21 pelled myths about African American inferiority.

22 (9) Douglass spoke forcefully about human op-
23 pression. On August 3rd, 1857, he delivered an ad-
24 dress in Canandaigua, New York, emphasizing the
25 work required to win freedom. “If there is no strug-

1 gle there is no progress. Those who profess to favor
2 freedom and yet deprecate agitation are men who
3 want crops without plowing up the ground; they
4 want rain without thunder and lightning. They want
5 the ocean without the awful roar of its many
6 waters.” “This struggle may be a moral one, or it
7 may be a physical one, and it may be both moral
8 and physical, but it must be a struggle. Power con-
9 cedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it
10 never will. Find out just what any people will quietly
11 submit to and you have found out the exact measure
12 of injustice and wrong which will be imposed upon
13 them, and these will continue till they are resisted
14 with either words or blows, or with both. The limits
15 of tyrants are prescribed by the endurance of those
16 whom they oppress.”.

17 (10) Douglass was active politically, endorsing
18 the anti-slavery platform of the Republican Party.
19 He advised President Abraham Lincoln during the
20 Civil War, pressing him to emancipate all slaves and
21 allowing their enlistment in the Union Army. This
22 policy would prove crucial to the Union Army’s re-
23 cruiting efforts and eventual victory over the Con-
24 federacy.

1 (11) Douglass became the first Black journalist
2 granted access to the Capitol press galleries. Hold-
3 ing membership from 1871 to 1875, he diligently re-
4 ported on legislative developments within the House
5 and Senate during the Reconstruction era. His re-
6 ports consistently provided vital information to
7 Black communities, bridging the gap between legis-
8 lative actions and their impacts on these commu-
9 nities.

10 (12) After the war, Douglass continued to work
11 on full implementation of abolition. Despite the pas-
12 sage of the Thirteenth Amendment that outlawed
13 slavery, Douglass argued that “the work of Aboli-
14 tionists is not done”, and that equal citizenship and
15 rights were essential to finish the cause. He sup-
16 ported the passage of the Fourteenth and Fifteenth
17 Amendments, pushing above all for the right for
18 black men to vote.

19 (13) Douglass continued to advocate for full en-
20 gagement and enfranchisement of Blacks in society,
21 denouncing and speaking on segregation and the
22 growing wave of violence against Blacks in the
23 American South. Frustrated that the promises of
24 Reconstruction had not come to fruition, Douglass
25 spoke in New Hampshire during the winter of 1875.

1 He pondered to audiences why “the American people
2 could stand for the centralization of slavery”, but
3 not “stand the centralization for liberty”.

4 (14) Douglass held several important public of-
5 fices, including U.S. Marshal for the District of Co-
6 lumbia (1877 to 1881), Recorder of Deeds for the
7 District of Columbia (1881 to 1886), and Minister
8 to Haiti (1889 to 1891), further solidifying his role
9 as a statesman and leader.

10 (15) Douglass was relentless in his push for
11 equality through forceful speeches and writings until
12 his death on February 20th, 1895. On February
13 21st, 1895, the U.S. Senate passed a resolution to
14 adjourn to mourn his passing. Douglass laid in state
15 in City Hall as tributes to his life spread across the
16 country.

17 (16) Frederick Douglass’s impact is not con-
18 fined to his era. His speeches, writings, and actions
19 set precedents and laid foundations for future stages
20 of the civil rights movement. His life story serves as
21 a testament to the resilience of the human spirit and
22 the power of determination. Reminding Americans
23 that, “If there is no struggle, there is no progress.”,
24 the legacy of Frederick Douglass persists today in
25 Easton, Maryland and across the world as his teach-

1 ings, values, and ideals continue to inspire, chal-
2 lenge, and guide our nation towards a brighter, more
3 inclusive future.

4 **SEC. 3. CONGRESSIONAL GOLD MEDAL.**

5 (a) PRESENTATION AUTHORIZED.—The Speaker of
6 the House of Representatives and the President pro tem-
7 pore of the Senate shall make appropriate arrangements
8 for the posthumous presentation, on behalf of Congress,
9 of a gold medal of appropriate design to Frederick Doug-
10 lass, in recognition of his contributions to the cause of
11 freedom, human rights, and the abolition of slavery in the
12 United States.

13 (b) DESIGN AND STRIKING.—For purposes of the
14 presentation referred to in subsection (a), the Secretary
15 of the Treasury (referred to in this Act as the “Sec-
16 retary”) shall strike a gold medal with suitable emblems,
17 devices, and inscriptions, to be determined by the Sec-
18 retary.

19 (c) AWARD OF MEDAL.—

20 (1) IN GENERAL.—After the award of the gold
21 medal referred to in subsection (a), the gold medal
22 shall be given to the National Museum of African
23 American History and Culture, where it shall be dis-
24 played as appropriate.

1 (2) SENSE OF CONGRESS.—It is the sense of
2 Congress that the National Museum of African
3 American History and Culture should make the gold
4 medal received under paragraph (1) available for
5 display elsewhere, particularly at other locations and
6 events associated with Frederick Douglass.

7 **SEC. 4. DUPLICATE MEDALS.**

8 Under such regulations as the Secretary may pre-
9 scribe, the Secretary may strike and sell duplicates in
10 bronze of the gold medal struck under section 3, at a price
11 sufficient to cover the costs of the medals, including labor,
12 materials, dies, use of machinery, and overhead expenses.

13 **SEC. 5. STATUS OF MEDALS.**

14 (a) NATIONAL MEDALS.—Medals struck under this
15 Act are national medals for purposes of chapter 51 of title
16 31, United States Code.

17 (b) NUMISMATIC ITEMS.—For purposes of section
18 5134 of title 31, United States Code, all medals struck
19 under this Act shall be considered to be numismatic items.

20 **SEC. 6. AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS; PROCEEDS OF**
21 **SALE.**

22 (a) AUTHORITY TO USE FUND AMOUNTS.—There is
23 authorized to be charged against the United States Mint
24 Public Enterprise Fund such amounts as may be nec-

1 essary to pay for the costs of the medals struck pursuant
2 to this Act.

3 (b) PROCEEDS OF SALE.—The amounts received
4 from the sale of duplicate bronze medals authorized under
5 section 5 shall be deposited into the United States Mint
6 Public Enterprise Fund.

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