

# Detroit, MI



## Origins of Juneteenth

America became a free nation on July 4, 1776. However, enslaved African Americans remained in bondage for nearly a century after the first Independence Day. The Emancipation Proclamation, signed on January 1, 1863, legally freed enslaved people in states that were in rebellion against the U.S. Nevertheless, slavery had not been officially abolished across the entire nation. It was not until June 19, 1865 that General Gordon Granger delivered Order No. 03, declaring all slaves free in America, two years after the Emancipation Proclamation. Juneteenth was first formally observed in Texas and has since spread across the nation, including to the city of Detroit as Black Americans moved north during the Great Migration.

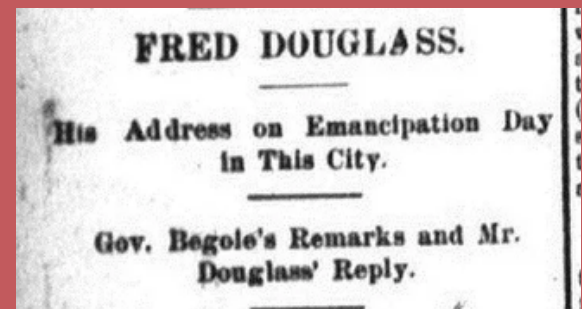
## Celebrations of Freedom in Detroit

### Emancipation Day in Detroit

Since 1834, Black residents of Michigan, Ohio, and Ontario have celebrated August 1 as Emancipation Day. This early celebration marked the end of slavery in the British Empire and played a significant role in the abolitionist movement in the American Northeast. Emancipation Day celebrations on August 1 evolved to include political elements such as speeches, rallies, and marches through the streets. Records indicate that soldiers in the Michigan 102nd U.S. Colored Troops commemorated Emancipation Day during the Civil War, and they continued to do so after the war ended.

### Frederick Douglass Speaks at Battle Creek

On August 4, 1884, more than 15,000 Michigan residents gathered in Battle Creek to celebrate the liberation of the enslaved people in the West Indies in 1869. At the annual Emancipation Day Celebration, the keynote speaker for the event was none other than Frederick Douglass, a Civil War leader, and notable abolitionist. The event was marked by a baseball game, music, food, train rides, and a speech by Douglass. Douglass' speech stressed the importance of remembering the struggle of black Americans, including the fight to abolish slavery, the Civil War, and the right to vote. His speech captivated the audience and is regarded as one of his greatest oratory moments.



Battle Creek Daily Journal, Aug. 4, 1884. Willard Library Digital Archive

### Juneteenth in Detroit

Similar to other Northern cities, Black Americans from the South migrated to Detroit, Michigan during a period known as the Great Migration. The new black residents of Detroit in the 1920s brought the Juneteenth tradition with them. As a result, Black Detroiters began observing both Emancipation Day on Aug. 1 and Juneteenth. Juneteenth was officially recognized and widely celebrated in Detroit during the 1990s and later became an official state holiday in 2005. On Juneteenth, Detroit hosts a variety of events, including picnics, beach parties, concerts, BBQ block parties, and exhibitions.

## Trailblazers of Freedom

### Sojourner Truth

Sojourner Truth is a well-known and revered abolitionist and advocate for women's rights in America. Born into slavery with the name Isabella Bomfree, she was sold four times before gaining her freedom in 1827. For most of her adult life, she traveled throughout the American Northeast, delivering sermons and speeches about the abolition of slavery, temperance, and women's rights. Her most famous speech, "Ain't I a Woman," gained her notoriety. In the mid-1850s, she settled in Battle Creek, MI, approximately 120 miles away from Detroit. She is buried in Oak Hill Cemetery in Battle Creek.



### Malcolm X

Malcolm X was born Malcolm Little in Lansing, Michigan, a small town nearly 100 miles from Detroit. His early childhood was marked by trauma, including the tragic death of his father, his mother's admission into an insane asylum, and his placement into foster care. Malcolm was a star student until he lost interest in formal schooling in his early teenage years. As a youth living in Boston, he was involved in petty crime and gang activity, where he gained the nickname "Detroit Red."

Malcolm Little transformed into Malcolm X after undergoing a personal transformation and evolution while in prison from 1946 to 1952. He converted to the Nation of Islam and gained a following among other Black Nationalists. He became a minister and national representative of the Nation of Islam in America. Malcolm was a great public speaker, organizer, and community leader. In 1964, he founded the Muslim Mosque after departing from the Nation. During the mid-1960s, he campaigned for more involvement in the American Civil Rights Movement and Black empowerment.



## The Path to Absolute Equality

### Final Stop on the Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad was a secretive network in the first half of the 19th century that helped enslaved people find freedom from chattel slavery in America. Those seeking freedom would travel mainly on foot, often during the night, to find safety in towns that provided shelter from slave catchers. The people who led this network, known as "conductors," risked their lives to offer runaways shelter, food, and medical care. Detroit was a crucial stop due to its proximity to Canada, marking the final stop on the railroad before crossing into Canada. Many conductors in Detroit welcomed freedom seekers into their homes, businesses, and other establishments. Notable stops on the Underground Railroad included the Finney Hotel and the T. Whitney Steamship.

### Civic Organizations Form to Support Black Detroiters

Detroit has a long-standing history of well-established networks and organizations aimed at supporting Black residents in the city. As early as the 1920s, the National Afro-American League was established to support Black residents who faced legal woes or needed assistance. In 1912, the first chapter of the Detroit NAACP was chartered to support Black churches and businesses. A few years later, in 1916, the Detroit Urban League was founded to create an advocacy network that promoted civil rights, anti-discrimination, and economic self-reliance in the Black community of Detroit.

### Blacks Face the Housing Crisis in Detroit

In the 1920s, Detroit experienced a significant increase in its Black population, known as the "Great Migration." This period was marked by the movement of Black people from the southern United States to northern cities in search of employment and better living conditions. The auto factory of Henry Ford, which was part of the booming auto industry, attracted many Black families to Detroit. By the late 1930s, the Black population in Detroit had exceeded 120,000, with over 85% of the Black residents coming from the South. As the Black population grew, city leaders began enforcing discriminatory housing practices to prevent Black families from moving into predominantly white neighborhoods. For example, Inkster, Detroit became a settlement for Black families who were not allowed to live in areas like Dearborn. Over the following decades, policies such as redlining and racially restrictive covenants led to inadequate housing and economic hardship in Black communities. Additionally, the development of housing projects, segregated slums, and racially restrictive homeowner's association bylaws worsened the housing crisis in Detroit. Despite the decrease in Detroit's Black population over the 20th century, Black Detroiters have persistently advocated for improved housing, schools, and reduced crime and poverty in their city.



## Ralph Bunche

Bunche was born in 1904 in Detroit and he was recognized as an intelligent and scholarly child. Bunche was the first African American to earn a PhD in Political Science from an American college and to be inducted into the American Philosophical Society in 1950. He also achieved the remarkable distinction of being the first person of African descent to win a Nobel Peace Prize for his contribution to the establishment of the United Nations and for his involvement in peacekeeping negotiations during the 1940s Israeli conflicts.

## Leading Ladies of Detroit

Detroit was home to many famous African American women during the height of the Motown and Black Hollywood Era. Some of the most acclaimed leading ladies who paved the way for black women in the music and film industries include Aretha Franklin, Diana Ross, Della Reese, and Susie Garrett.



## Zeline Richard

Zeline McCullough Richard was a trailblazer in education and advocacy in Detroit, Michigan. As a native Detroiter, she was raised in Detroit's Black Bottom community and lived through the Detroit race riots of the 1940s. Richard was a career educator and was elected as president of the American Federation of Teachers in 1968. She was heavily involved as a community leader and was an active member of the Michigan Democratic Party.



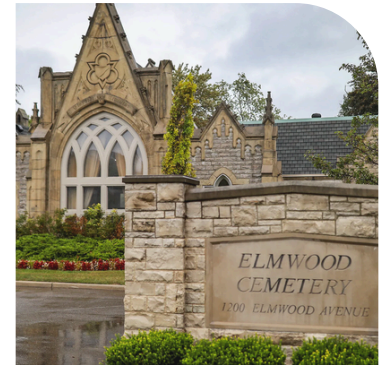
## UNDERGROUND RAILROAD MONUMENT

## FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH - UNDERGROUND RAILROAD MUSEUM



## MOTOWN RECORDS

## ELMWOOD CEMETERY GUIDED TOUR



## CHARLES WRIGHT MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY



## Historical Resources and References

### These Black Historical Figures are from Michigan

<https://www.metrotimes.com/detroit/these-black-historical-figures-are-from-michigan/Slideshow/35487339>

### 14 Lesser-Known African American Historical Sites in Detroit

<https://visitdetroit.com/inside-the-d/lesser-known-african-american-historical-sites-in-detroit/>

### Exploring Michigan's African American History. Pure Michigan.

<https://www.michigan.org/news/exploring-african-american-history#:~:text=Detroit%20was%20considered%20one%20of,safe%20refuges%20in%20the%20state.>



[www.absolteequality.org](http://www.absolteequality.org)