



#DouglassWeek 2024 | Belfast, Northern Ireland & online

Frederick Douglass historic talk at The Imperial Hotel during Black History Month in Collaboration with #DouglassWeek

The Imperial Hotel, Cork will unveil a new guest lounge named in honour of Frederick Douglass with a historic talk and walking tour of the Cork Abolitionists Trail on 12th October to celebrate this famous past guest

Cork's most historic hotel, The Imperial Hotel, will celebrate Black History Month this October with a talk on the life of Frederick Douglass, one of its esteemed past visitors, on 12th October.

On 23rd of October 1845, Douglass, pivotal U.S. abolitionist and statesman, gave a speech in The Great Room at the South Mall hotel, "American Prejudice Against Colour", which was widely published. Two days later, a great soiree was held for Douglass at St Patrick's Hall in the hotel.

Those who wish to attend the free event are invited to meet outside the hotel at 5.30pm on Thursday the 12th. They will be guided on a walking tour of the Cork Abolitionists Trail before returning back to the hotel for refreshments and a historic talk titled "Frederick Douglass, transatlantic abolitionism, and his October 1845 speech at the Imperial Hotel". The walk and talk will be led by Dr Adrian Mulligan and Dr Laurence Fenton, two members of the team from The Globe Lane Initiative / #DouglassWeek who created the Trail in 2021 with support from Cork City Council. The Trail commemorates the places where Douglass stayed and spoke during his visit to Cork, and also celebrates the city's rich abolitionist history. The talk will begin at 7pm in the Frederick Douglass Lounge. The Imperial Hotel is pleased to continue its ongoing partnership with The Globe Lane Initiative / #DouglassWeek for this special event and looks forward to future collaborations.

The Imperial Hotel will also officially launch this newly renovated executive guest lounge on the evening, which was named and decorated in honour of this great man.

Throughout Black History Month, the hotel will allow interested visitors to view The Frederick Douglass Lounge, which is normally reserved exclusively for hotel guests. It features a portrait of Douglass, reading materials, and framed lyrics of an old Irish verse performed by local poet Daniel Casey as a gesture of welcome to Frederick Douglass from the Anti-Slavery Society during one of their meetings. Abigail Rowe, who is both The Imperial Hotel's in-house historian and its food and beverage administrator, has been instrumental in ensuring historical accuracy in recounting the Frederick Douglass story and connection and has curated all of the wording and artwork used in the renovated lounge.

Douglass, who visited Cork in 1845, was a formerly enslaved Black American man who became a national leader of the abolitionist movement in the US. During this time, he gained fame for his prowess as a public speaker and anti-slavery writings. Douglass published his first autobiography, *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* and the resulting publicity put him at risk of being captured as a run-away slave. He was therefore



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persuaded to travel to Ireland and Britain on an extended lecture tour. Douglass spent three weeks in Cork in the late autumn of 1845, delivering powerful denunciations of slavery to crowds of thousands and building support for the abolitionist cause in America.

The Imperial Hotel is unique in that it is the oldest hotel in Cork and is steeped in social history, having hosted many events and famous faces over the years including Princess Grace of Monaco, Michael Collins, Charles Dickens and most recently President Michael D. Higgins. What surprises and delights visitors most about the hotel is that while it is very much a vibrant, luxurious city centre destination, it still retains its period character, strong historic identity and sense of grandeur derived from its vaulted ceilings, winding staircases, crystal chandeliers and, undoubtedly, the stories within the walls.

New owner of the hotel Louis Fitzgerald is himself a keen history enthusiast and collector of historical artefacts, so he is delighted to be celebrating the special connection with Frederick Douglass and oversee this famous past guests' name and story added to the Wall of History in the hotel's lobby.

For more information about Black History Month at The Imperial Hotel see imperialhotelcork.com and to reserve a place at for the Cork Abolitionists Trail tour and the Frederick Douglass talk see Eventbrite. To learn more about #DouglassWeek and their next annual event series in 2024, visit douglassweek.org.

-Ends-

Editors notes:

Extract from an 'Address to Frederick Douglass from the Anti-Slavery Society of Cork', Cork Examiner, 7 November 1845, A verse, 'Céad Míle Fáilte to the Stranger' was composed for the occasion by local poet, Daniel Casey, and sung by those in attendance:

“Stranger from a distant nation
We welcome thee with acclamation
And, as a brother warmly greet thee –
Rejoiced in Erin’s Isle to meet thee
Then Cead Mille Failte to the stranger,
Free from bondage, chains and danger.

Who could have heard thy hapless story,
Of tyrants – canting, base and gory;



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Whose heart throbb'd not with deep
pulsation

Oh! Why should different hue or feature

Prevent the sacred laws of Nature,

And every tie of feeling sever? –

The voice of Nature thunders ‘Never!’

Then borne o’er the Atlantic waters

The cry of Erin’s sons and daughters

For freedom shall henceforth be blended

Till Slavery’s hellish reign be ended.”

(by Daniel Casey)