



July 3, 2020

For so many of us July 4th is a day to celebrate that in 1776 the Continental Congress formally adopted the Declaration of Independence. “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all [people] are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”

The equality proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence was not fulfilled in the Constitution, which did not prohibit slavery, until amended after the Civil War. This country was built on the backs of enslaved Black peoples whose rights were not protected by the Declaration of Independence. Our nation’s Founders had vision, but it was limited. Today, we want to acknowledge those sentiments by turning to the words of Frederick Douglass:

“[July 4th] reveals to [the Black person], more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciation of tyrants, brass-fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade and solemnity, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages.”

The words of Frederick Douglass demand that we consider the Black American experiences in this country. And he was right. He advocated for full civil rights for ALL people who lived in this country. May we work together so that someday very soon America will be America for every person who lives here, regardless of race or the color of their skin.

May we dedicate ourselves to realizing a universal application of our Founders’ words so that the inherent worth and dignity of all human beings can be actualized and will be valued. When this happens America will truly be the beacon of life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness for all.

Signed,
Rabbi Amy Wallk Katz,
On behalf of the Interfaith Council of Greater Springfield