

"Embracing the profound reality that Black history is indistinguishably woven into the fabric of American history is not just a duty; it is a catalyst for our collective healing. To truly progress as a nation, we must confront this truth, even when it unsettles us, and courageously stand united in the journey toward justice, equality, and understanding."

- **Deloris Polk Joseph & Sidney A. Murray II**
New Bedford Human Rights Commission

Celebrating Black History Month: Embracing Progress, Embracing Unity

Today, as we come together to celebrate Black History Month, we embark on a journey through time, recognizing the remarkable progress made and acknowledging the challenges that persist. Just as we witness moments of advancement, we also encounter waves attempting to pull us backward. But it's crucial to remember that history is not merely a collection of facts; it's the living, breathing story of a nation, and in our case, the vibrant history of Black Americans in New Bedford.

New Bedford and the Legacy of Frederick Douglass:

Abolition Row Park stands as a testament to our commitment to preserving this history. Adorned with artful representations of Frederick Douglass and the Underground Railroad, the park visually narrates Douglass' life and the courage of the Underground Railroad's clandestine network. Through initiatives like the Abolition Row Park, we celebrate our local history, ensuring that stories of resilience echo through generations, embodying the tenacity rooted deep in the soil of New Bedford.

Beyond Black History: A Tapestry of Immigrant Stories:

New Bedford proudly identifies as an immigrant community, recognizing that the history of people of color is inseparable from the broader history of our nation. Black history is American history, a mosaic of stories that have shaped our collective identity. The New Bedford Historical Society has diligently worked to ensure that the perspectives of people of color are integral to our city's narrative. The result is a community enriched by diversity, a testament to the resilience and contributions of immigrants throughout history.

The Role of the Human Rights Commission:

As we reflect on the past, consider the present, and envision the future, the Human Rights Commission emerges as a beacon of progress. In the past, it has tirelessly championed initiatives to shed light on marginalized histories. In the present, it continues to foster understanding and unity through various programs and murals. Looking ahead, the commission is committed to preventing any regression in the progress achieved thus far.

Call to Action:

Today, we stand proud of our youth, recognizing that each individual has the power to ignite change. The spark of curiosity, the desire for justice, and the willingness to learn can propel us toward a future where equality prevails. Our call to action is clear:

Arise: Be aware of the challenges that persist and the work that needs to be done.

Unite: Collaborate with one another to amplify our impact and promote inclusivity.

Advance: Stand united against injustice and discrimination, advocating for a society that values diversity.

Act: Engage in open dialogue, fostering understanding and empathy across communities.

Achieve: Recognize that the journey toward equality is ongoing, requiring continuous effort and commitment.

Black history is American history, and our commitment to equality and justice must extend beyond the confines of a month. In celebrating Black History Month, let us not only acknowledge the struggles of the past but also affirm our commitment to a future where progress is steadfast, unity prevails, and the history we create is one of inclusivity and understanding. Thank you for joining us on this journey of reflection, education, and inspiration.

-The New Bedford Human Rights Commission