

# Frederick Douglas Field Dedication

## April 17, 2019

**Remarks by  
Nancy Cantor  
Chancellor  
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Welcome, everyone, and thank you for being a part of this celebration of justice, of Newark, and of their intersection. I think what makes today so very special is that this intersection doesn't just describe the historical convergence of one of the all-time greatest champions of justice, Frederick Douglass, with this place—this intersection really does define Newark.

- It defines our amazing Mayor, our civic leaders like Mildred Crump and the Municipal Council, our forward thinking state leaders, Governor Murphy, Senators Rice and Ruiz, Assemblywomen Pintor Marin and Speight, and the rest of the Essex Delegation, and our courageous federal leaders, Senators Booker and Menendez, and Congressman Donald Payne Jr.
- It defines the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra: let's hear it for them!
- It defines our community partners in this celebration—Todd Allen, whose historical research brought Douglass' work here to light for us, and Teresa Vega, whose own research documents the neighborhood that once stood here, including the lives of her ancestors—families who lived right here in this neighborhood and fought for the cause of abolition side by side with Frederick Douglass, himself.
- It defines what our Rutgers and Rutgers-Newark team has done—from President Barchi and our Board of Governors to our facilities professionals, colleagues from the Dana Library and the Newark Public Library, and the team of scholars and artists from the Clement A. Price Institute—including Noelle Williams, a Rutgers-Newark graduate student in American Studies and Public History who also designed a beautiful memorial that will stand here. Together, they have been working to realize the vision for this day (and beyond), under the guidance and leadership of the amazing Marcia Brown, who coordinated all of these efforts.
- And today, with the visit of our special guest, Kenneth Morris, Jr., this intersection of justice and Newark takes on new meaning, as Kenneth embodies quite literally the legacy of Frederick Douglass, as his great-great-great grandson—and as if that weren't enough historical weight for one person to bear, he is also the great-great grandson of Booker T. Washington! Thank you, Ken, for being with us on behalf of the descendants of the man who has brought us all together today.

And “together” is the operative word. As a social psychologist, I know that it takes broad coalitions to make real change. That is what Frederick Douglass was about and what our coalition of university and community partners gathered here today is about.

We are here to dedicate this place in the name of Frederick Douglass, but none of us would be satisfied if that was all we did today. And we know Douglass wouldn't be either. As important as

historical memory is, the real power of memory is how we use it to inform what we do today and what we will do tomorrow—and my friends, you know as I do that we all have a lot of work to do to achieve the vision of a city, a state, a nation, and a world where there truly is equality of opportunity for all.

That is why we are engaged together across the sectors of this community in so many collaborative projects designed to bring the power of our collective memories and collective assets to bear on making a collective impact on the great challenges that remain before us to achieve a more just world, from educational attainment and equitable development to stronger, safer, healthier neighborhoods, to realizing the creative potential in Newarkers of all ages.

And speaking of all ages, we all know that at the heart of social change are the next generation change-makers who will follow in the mighty footsteps of ardent visionaries like Frederick Douglass—and we at Rutgers-Newark are proud to be cultivating the talent of just those change-makers—especially with an eye to our Newark talent (who by the way now make up 13.5% of our undergraduate student body). We know that our students will make a difference, as they join with Superintendent Roger Leon’s next generation of change makers, their brothers and sisters in the Newark Public Schools (together writing essays in honor of Frederick Douglass). They all are taking their lead from the son of Newark, Ras J. Baraka, who leads us all forward.

This is what it means today to strive to realize the full potential of our democracy—the goal that so inspired Frederick Douglass, a goal that connects us with him profoundly as we stand here today. It is not just a good thing, but an essential thing that we be here together to mark this day and recommit to this work.

And now I invite to the podium someone who is a strong supporter of this work and whose leadership enabled us to secure the commitment of the Rutgers Board of Governors to name this special place in honor of Frederick Douglass: Rutgers University President Robert L. Barchi.